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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Resistance: Authoring My Own Teacher Education

BY

Janette C. Knutson

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

Edmonton, Alberta
FALL, 1993

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ISBN 0-315-88315-4

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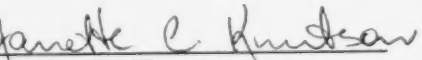

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Dean Clandinin
Dr. D. Jean Clandinin

Don Fay
Dr. Al MacKay

Janis Blakey
Dr. Janis Blakey

DATE: July 5, 1993.

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to teachers everywhere whose awesome job it is to help our children work towards creating a better world for themselves and others, and to my children, Jessica, Erica and Leif for whom I wish healthy living full of awe, wonder and surprise.

Resistance: Authoring My Own Teacher Education

Abstract

Teacher education has traditionally been concerned with the performance aspect of teaching and learning. The human aspect, who we are as teachers and learners, has been regarded as something superfluous, something soft, something not easily measurable. Furthermore, there has been little attention paid to the consideration of a connection between our private, public and professional selves.

This study involves a careful examination of a collection of personal, unpublished letters sent from Vietnam during its war/conflict/experience. The study weaves together the concepts of autobiography, narrative and story in an attempt to identify what is important enough to put down in words and send in a letter from a warzone and also what is important enough to re-collect as I tell my story of becoming a teacher. There is a consideration that what is important enough to write about in a warzone could also correspond to what matters in the "World" and also what matters in education.

It is, therefore, a study of how I authored my own life in the medium of letters and came to think about teaching and who I am as a person who is a teacher. It is a study of the nontraditional in teacher education.

Embedded in the study is, further, a consideration that the personal letter as a pedagogical medium, not only informs the receiver about its author and her/his life experience and sensemaking, but also informs self, as framed in the words chosen and not chosen to be written down.

Acknowledgments

There are many people who have assisted me in this journey back in time and whose encouragement enabled me to continue through difficult turns: Mel, my constant friend, who demonstrated his inner strength and security by supporting my work, another milestone in understanding as we partner our lives together. Angela who gave me a story of wonder to reflect on forever. My letter writer friends, wherever they are, for whom I wish peace and healing particularly if they are still carrying shrapnel in their hearts. I remain grateful for the understandings they helped me form. My advisor, Dr. Jean Clandinin and committee member, Dr. Al MacKay who gave me the voice to speak my truth as well as the nod of approval to take the risk and Ian Sewall who helped me to extend my thinking. Heidi Lauber and the children who have been in my classes for all the things they have taught me. Cliff Meyer for reaching back and reaching forward by reading my proposal and offering his support as a friend who was one of the letter writers. Deborah Skaret and Katherine Graff who have readily been on the other end of the telephone to support me in moments of self doubt and encourage me with my writing. Margaret Rathnavalu, Judy Sommer, Caroline Felt, Marie Ponto and Joanne Neff, my kindred spirit teacher friends who care deeply about our job of teaching and what it means to teach. Jessica, Erica and Leif for their continuing inspiration.

> So often ... students soon to become doctors, lawyers, architects, businessmen, teachers or engineers are understandably preoccupied with their performing selves, with matters of technique, of knowledge - even though ... it is your response to the ethical questions that will make you what you are (Williams in Coles, 1989, p. 119).

AN UNFINISHED STORY

ANGELA:: Miss Byron, this morning I heard the butterflies talking to the flowers.

MISS BYRON: Oh that's nice, Angela.

NARRATOR: Angela walked around the playground with Miss Byron for a little longer. The excitement in her eyes and her smile slowly faded. She saw a friend, quickly let go of Miss Byron's hand and ran off to tell her story again, hoping that maybe her friend would want to know just what it was the butterflies said.

POSTSCRIPT: I am Miss Byron and I am the narrator of Angela's story. It wasn't until I began to listen with hearing to my own children's stories that Angela's words shot like a rocket from the past to the forefront of my mind and conscience. I really regret for both Angela and myself that I wasn't attentive enough and child enough, to ask what the butterflies said. But it's too late now. Angela is grown up and probably doesn't even remember that once she overheard a very special conversation. Reflection on this experience has made me ever attentive to the need to listen with hearing in the hope that next time I won't miss an opportunity to find out what the butterflies said and to nurture a child's way of knowing.

It is my experiences with people of all ages and backgrounds, my oral and written conversations with these people and the times I have been left with a sense of unfinished business regarding these experiences and conversations, that have led me, at some point after, to reflect and restory with new insight, giving me a better chance of not missing future opportunities to share in the discovery of what may really matter.

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Chapter 1

Towards Authorization

Narratively speaking, any experience may be considered a text (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; White & Epston, 1990) and the telling about that experience, a performance (White & Epston, 1990). Through reflection and memory selection, the experience can be restoried (Bruner, 1986) and in the process, authorized.

Choosing the Non Traditional Text

> *Hi Jan,*
> *I'm glad to hear you got that scholarship you were hoping for. Now I hope you get that transfer. Best of luck.*[1]

This was the beginning of a three year consideration into life, not only in the "what's it all about" sense but also in consideration of the significance of a human life. At the time this letter was written, I had finished high school and had a summer job in a record shop. The scholarship was awarded on the basis of my score on the sixth form (grade twelve) external examinations. It was a Teachers' Scholarship, which meant that the New South Wales (NSW) State Government in Australia would pay for my three year Arts Degree at the University of NSW, and, my one year Teacher Training Diploma at Alexander Mackie Teachers' College. I would be qualified at the end of these four years to teach high school English and History. As well as my tuition fees, there was a monthly living allowance. The payback was five years teaching service with the NSW Department of Education. It meant a commitment of nine years. I would be almost twenty seven before my bond terminated. To a seventeen year old with a

[1] Italicized words in this thesis represent excerpts from the letters.

restrictive background, nine years felt like a sentence which I wasn't sure I could finish.

I would have preferred the Teachers' Scholarship that had less status and less of a sentence. It was for a three year Teachers' College Diploma Course in Elementary Education. The bond was three years; a six year rather than a nine year sentence. Had I the choice, I would have preferred no sentence at all. But, for whatever reason, I accepted the university scholarship and proceeded to, in name only, live the life of the institution.

In the traditional sense, it is a story of failure. I stopped attending lectures and I stopped handing in assignments. I failed my year at New South Wales University. I passed Sociology which to me was interesting and a matter of common sense and failed the other three subjects, whatever they were. Passing one subject meant that I could transfer to Alexander Mackie Teachers' College and retain my scholarship without the living allowance for the first year. My sentence was decreasing.

Teachers' College was even less engaging than university. It was obvious, in an academic sense, that transferring to Elementary Education at the Teachers' College, meant cutting back several watts in brain power. It was a generalist program with "how to teach" courses in nine subjects that ran over both terms each year. The dominant view imparted was one of teacher as expert (Britzman, 1986). It was the expert's moral duty to impart her knowledge to the students in her class who would then know what she knew and prove it by giving back that knowledge on written tests. For me, this did not tell the whole story. Something was missing.

I "took the next year off", taught grade 1 in a Catholic school for $25 a

week and learned that children, like Angela, have wonderful imaginations, ocean-deep feelings, intriguing thoughts and a connection with nature that the rest of us seemed to have lost. During the next two years, I completed the traditionally accepted version of my teacher training and I "became" a teacher.

In the framework of a life, we story many texts (Bruner, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; White & Epson, 1990). Most of us story more than one text at a time and I am no exception. During 1968, 1969 and 1970, the three years I have briefly described, I was also storying another text. In this text I was engaged in the authoring of my own knowledge; about life, my own and others, about friendship, about caring, about morality and values, about beauty, about love, about pain, about time, about authority and about power. In short, I was learning about what it is to be a human among humans on this earth, and more remarkably and most significantly, I was learning about education and what it means "to be" a teacher.

My knowledge was developed through writing letters to people who were living and dying in a combat zone, soldiers attempting to survive their tour of duty in Vietnam, boys who were my age or a little older who had come to see past the facade of surface living to discover, or at least try to discover, what was really important in life, what mattered.

Finding out what was really important was a crucial question for me too, although it has taken a process of reflection and many more years of living to bring me to this understanding. At the time, I probably thought I was doing them the favour of writing when they were cut off from their traditional culture and values. Now I see that they held a mirror to me and created a reflection upon which I could frame my understandings of my self and the world around me, a

mirror which also enables me to look back and remember. I am about to embark in the exploration of the riches of this gift given so long ago and to share the bounty in a place of learning with fellow (re)searchers who also seek the meaning of what it is to be human and what it is to teach. Narrative is providing a way for me to merge the two dominant texts of my life during 1968, 1969 and 1970. The letter continues:

> *I'm fine and I'm not fighting too hard. We've only been in the field since the 31st of Jan. On the 2nd of Feb. we were hit by an ambush and fought for about 2 hrs. We had 2 men killed and 5 wounded & 2 missing. Smith and I were the 2 missing. It happened when everybody pulled back to Echo Hill. I was just too faraway and it was getting dark so I crawled into a clump of bushes and spent the night.*
>
> *Sorry about not saying goodbye. I just left without thinking.*
>
> *To be truthful I don't think Ron is in the Navy therefore he can't be AWOL. I've been in about a year and a half and Ron just didn't act like he was in the service at all.*
>
> *I went back on Thursday and got back to my outfit in time. So there were no repercussions.*
>
> *In 209 days I'll rotate out of the Nam. That puts my rotation date about the 7th of September. That may seem like an awful long time but time goes by mighty fast over here.*
>
> *Camp Carroll, which is east of Khe Sanh, is where I'm at. Right now we are working in the surrounding area of Carroll. We have had 2 firefights. The Communist Casualties since the 29th of Jan. have totalled 21,000. You can count on double that number because the Commies drag away as many bodies of their dead as they can.*
>
> *I mailed that letter you gave me on the evening of the 11th about 1 hour after I landed at Danang.*
>
> *I don't want you to worry so I'll not write anymore bad news. I'll say "Roger out" for now,*
>
> *Your Friend Forever,*
> *Larry.*
>
> *P.S. Just keep asking questions.*
> *I'll answer them if I can.*

I answered this letter but didn't receive a reply. I presumed that the

author, Larry, didn't want to write anymore. In July, 1992 I sent to Washington for the Directory of Americans whose names are permanently etched into the black granite face of the Wall, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I learned that Larry died February 17, 1968, six days after he wrote this letter and before I even read it. It's a daunting thought that for so long I incorrectly presumed his reason for not replying. His memory is created from one letter and very brief meetings in a record shop where I worked in a summer job in 1968. In dying, he has demanded that I seek understanding about the significance of "forever" and "time" and "asking questions" and "sorry" and "without thinking" and "to be truthful" and "fighting" in the context of my life as a mother, nurturer, wife, friend, learner and teacher. Significantly, stories can become metaphors for change (Jalongo, 1992) and as I reinterpret this story so many years later, it becomes a guide for how I interpret relations in the future in both my personal and professional life. He has left me a story to reflect on upwards and downwards, frontwards and backwards, a story that at the same time spirals in on itself and out again (Le Guin, 1979). Is it possible to stretch our imaginations and say that his death had meaning after all? Something about the context in which he died makes his ultimate sacrifice difficult to justify on any grounds. Couldn't his story have been told another way? He died in a war but this is not a war story since:

> a true war story is never moral. It does not instruct, nor encourage virtue, nor suggest models of proper human behavior. ... There is no rectitude whatsoever. There is no virtue. As a rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true war story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to obscenity and evil. (O'Brien, 1991, p. 76)

This is not a war story. It is a story without a qualifier to categorize it. I

wonder what stories he left for his family and friends, what stories each of the 58,182 (Maclear, 1981) other American men and women, the Australian and allied men and women, and the Vietnamese children, women and men who died in Vietnam left behind in the "World" and I wonder where those stories are. Who tells their stories, their nonwar, their human, their alive stories and who is interested enough to listen?

The Letters: Their Origins and Their Survival.

The American Government had arranged with the Australian Government to allow its servicemen to spend their six days Rest and Recreation in Sydney. Australia was a participating ally of the United States in its war/conflict/experience in Vietnam and this was a way of injecting money into the Australian economy in order to help with the war effort. Thailand, the Philippines and Japan, who also assisted the US in its Vietnam involvement, likewise opened their doors to American servicemen.

My summer job in the record shop in Sydney, Australia, started about the same time. Larry was one of many to wander into the shop, look through albums and start talking. Exchanging addresses was an inevitable consequence of meeting an American on R&R. I have come to more fully understand the reason for this after years of reading and watching movies about the American involvement in Vietnam. The writing of, sending, receiving and responding to letters created an umbilical cord that kept people who were living in a warzone connected with the outside "World." Could it have been a way of keeping sane while living a life that inhibited the processing of feelings (Marshall, 1987)? "If you don't feel, you can't be hurt, you'll survive" (Van Devanter, 1983, p.144) and if

you deny something it will cease to exist:

> You denied everything, like the whole Nam language - you could carry on whole conversations and not use anything other than the slang of Vietnam. Vietnam was a world unto itself. The concept of going back to "the World" meaning the real world always told me that we'd been exiled to some hellish place. Anything that happened in Vietnam wasn't real. You just got through it. (Marshall, 1987, p. 233)

Perhaps it was a way for human beings to stop themselves from dissolving entirely into their surroundings (Le Guin, 1979). Or perhaps writing letters was a way to stay in the middle, away from the edge, conscious of a beginning and anxious for *an* end, but not *the* end.

My summer job extended into a weekend job and I later worked as a waitress in a coffee shop/restaurant in the same area. I met many American servicemen. It seemed far more appropriate to spend my time talking with them than to attend lectures in a cold theatre at the university with hundreds of other students; and it also seemed far more appropriate to spend my time writing letters to them after they left than to write the essays that were assigned by university professors who didn't even know my name.

Sometimes a person would send a letter with a friend and the friend would also write. Sometimes two friends wrote at the same time and revealed their support for each other:

> *... I decided not to write any letters home or to anyone in the States till I have 100 days left.*
>
> *We are put up about 4 miles from Saigon, the first few nights after R&R we got mortared and rocketed every night in our base camp, but we haven't been hit now for almost a week although Saigon still is getting some enemy activity.*
>
> *Steve came out yesterday and he put up a tent next to mine. We talked last night for about 2 hours about back home.*

With everyone I met and wrote to, I experienced caring and concern. If feelings really weren't processed in Vietnam, there certainly was an effort made to be truly humane while on R&R and in letters. At least that was my experience.

The letters have survived because I inherited, from my Grandmother, a capacity to comfortably hoard these and other "nonvaluable" memorabilia in a memory box (Clandinin & Connelly in press) that continues to fill with life's moments. Saving my letters has been as natural as breathing. Perhaps in Grandma's case and mine, receiving mail was a major acknowledgement of our "presence in the world" (White & Epston 1990, p108). Going to the mailbox with the expectation of finding a letter addressed to me became a ritual, and still is, although my expectation is now only occasionally fulfilled, as I have learned that usually I have to write letters in order to receive them. Time is the factor that currently inhibits my letter writing. Time and space have reversed my priorities as I currently find my fit in the academic setting, combining graduate degree work with the experience that delayed an undergraduate degree all those years ago.

Perhaps the need to express myself in a safe place in the form of a letter to a friend is not as pressing now because of the intensity of my current reflective focus in writing this thesis. White and Epston considered the ritual of going to the mailbox on arrival home and before attending to anything else as one "through which persons reinsert themselves into, and reassert their place in, a familiar world" (1990, p. 107). After my Grandmother died in 1981, the family could hardly wait to clean the place and her store of memories were trashed. It's not clear what she intended for her collection but I shudder to think what was lost. I would like to be able to ask her why she kept everything, including letters,

as I consider the possibility of this strong woman needing to position herself in her world through what others wrote to her. I wonder for myself too.

As a result of looking into my past I have begun to see the multilayering of my life and found myself engaged in "REsearch" which, "like REcognition, is a REflexive act. It means looking and looking again" (Berthoff, 1987, p. 30). Lynda Van Devanter was an army nurse who wrote a narrative account of her experiences in Vietnam and her readjustment back home (1983). Her description of experiencing what is termed Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome (PTSD) spurred me to look into the poetry and prose I wrote for no audience when I travelled alone in England and Holland in 1975. That excursion took me to my saved collection of letters from other friends and I experienced an awakening (Clandinin & Connelly, forthcoming). I discovered that letter writing has been an important lifelong way for me to connect with others and to gain knowledge not only about the letter writers and their context, both personal and public, but about myself.

I anticipate several more awakenings through reflection in the mirror provided by my letter writing friends of the Vietnam era. "Their" letters have become "my" letters. The letters I refer to are those written to me from Vietnam and will sometimes be referenced as "their letters" but mostly as "my letters". I do not have the letters I wrote, except for four that for some reason were not sent. The meanings I create are merely my meanings and maybe not the same meanings of my friends who wrote the letters. While we author our own lives, we are led to the wonder of who we are in other authors' texts, as varied as those texts may be at any one time.

> *I'm tired of running around the jungles and mountains looking for more people to kill ... I've killed 9 people in the last 10 months, but about half of them were civilians, people that had no apparent connection with the enemy. Maybe they were V.C. sympathizers or suppliers. Do you know what our orders were. Shoot anyone that runs from us. My squad killed 17 in one afternoon. Seventeen people, 17 human beings*
>
> *When I got to Sydney, it was like being born again. When I was with you it was just great to be alive. Please don't think me too forward for saying these things and please don't think that I'm looking for a shoulder to cry on. It's just the way I feel right now. I shouldn't even be writing this. I'll write again when I'm in a better mood.*

Macy (1983) urges us to feel the pain and experience grief together. To show compassion is to acknowledge our interconnection and interdependence with each other: "It is the praxis of interconnectedness" (Hildegard of Bingen in Fox, 1990). Noddings (1984) has given me a language to talk about the natural desire to live in relation by describing a basic human leaning towards an ethical ideal defined in terms of caring and being cared for:

> The ethical ideal springs from two sentiments: the natural sympathy human beings feel for each other and the longing to maintain, recapture or enhance our most caring and tender moments (p.104).

I cannot remember how I responded to the above letter as a sheltered girl just turned eighteen. I do not know if it was within my ability to comprehend the depth of such pain. I know I did not pass judgement on the writer. I just cannot be sure that I would have been able to find the right words to reply with the compassion required to respond as one-caring. I am not sure that I still would be able to say/write the words required to respond adequately. But I read those words and I still feel the pain they embrace both for the writer and the

Vietnamese people, all of who became the victims. It becomes devastatingly obvious that MyLai where between five and six hundred unarmed women, children and old men were massacred in 1968 (Peck, 1983) was not an isolated incident, but perhaps an example of what was commonplace.

Fox (1990) writes about the artist as one who gives us the "isness" of life and O'Brien (1990) describes the writer's task as one of telling the "aboutness" of a story. If an artist is one that feels compassion through connection with his/her fellow human, and if the artist is one who does something with that compassion in the form of giving back understanding so that it reaches into the mind and heart of others in a way that "doesn't get easily shaken off" (Williams in Coles, p.120), then I see that the people with whom I corresponded and I were engaged in a dialogic artistic creation about ourselves, each other and our "Worlds".

For my friends in Vietnam, letter writing was a self expression that allowed voice. They are feminine expressions by boys who were supposed to be men (Maclear, 1978) who were supposed to be warriors. I always thought of them as boys:

> *I don't consider myself "sweet" or a boy but don't think it bothers me as I just took it the wrong way.*

Their generals and the politicians who sent them there were men, but not men in the heroic sense, men in the sense of being the ones who made the rules and gave the orders. The boys I met were different. My upbringing had something to do with the way I thought about these things.

I grew up in a four generation household of women and girls: my Great Grandmother, Grandma, my Mother, my sister and me. I never experienced the "father tongue", only the "mother tongue" (Le Guin, 1989, p.150) predominantly

spoken by Grandma. Having said that, it's possible that she spoke both the father tongue and the mother tongue for she had clear ideas about what was acceptable and what was not as well as knowing how to lay down the law. My teachers were also women in an all girls' school. In fact all the authority figures in my world were women. I didn't know that men weren't supposed to be vulnerable, that they "aren't used to that" and that "they're trained not to offer but to attack" (Le Guin, 1989, p.151).

The people with whom I corresponded seemed to have no trouble expressing their vulnerability. But why was that? Maybe they were different in their living of Vietnam to who they were in their letters. I have no way of knowing. I don't often recognize my letter writers in movies' and books' portrayals of the Vietnam War.

Several writers (Heilbrun 1988; White & Epston 1990; Gwyn 1992; Mowat 1992; Steinem 1992) have suggested that personal letters and photographs tell a truer story of a person's life than an autobiography which only reveals what is comfortable and what is acceptable Maybe the fact that they would probably never see me again allowed them to reveal deeper feelings. A friend of mine, whose brother served in Vietnam for two years, told me the letters between her brother and their family revealed nothing of what was going on over there or what he was going through. For whatever reason, in the letters they wrote to me their feelings seeped, at times like a wound, between the lines and in and around the words, despite the "don't mean nothin', man" credo for emotional survival in Vietnam, and despite attempts to conceal them. All desired to be understood:

> *I have the feeling you understand me far better than most people who have known me all my life. I feel you know the real me.*

War affects people who experience it firsthand in a way the rest of us can only imagine, and even imagination cannot let us *know* what Armageddon people who become warriors face.

> *Since I have been out of the Service I have had about 6 different jobs. My temper has gotten the best of me. I can't stand these people asking questions about Viet Nam. If they only knew how it was over there. The buddies you left behind. I guess I talk too much I am about half drunk.*

Farley Mowat's father wrote to him while he was in Europe during World War II and reflected on the devastation of those who battled in World War I and were not understood. It seems that nothing has changed:

> The most unfortunate people after the last war were not those who were wounded physically, but those who had had their feet knocked out from under them spiritually and never regained them. The beer parlours and the gutters are still full of them, poor bastards, and nobody understands. Or so few understand that it doesn't matter. (Mowat, 1992, p.13)

Obedience can diminish a person's ethical capacities (Noddings, 1984) even obedience to military dictates and obedience to school rules when the obedient one is forced to follow blindly and not question. Pain can follow when the institutions and customs are cast off and the spirit tries to resurrect itself after being in submission, only to discover that it was all a lie. When my spirit began to emerge away from the restriction of the bondage of my schooling it was both liberating and very frightening.

For me, the participation in letter writing was an act of defiance. I can recall at the time being aware that in others' scripts I would be viewed as shirking my responsibilities to my education and to my future. My defiance was

particularly poignant in view of my education at Domremy Ladies' College with its strict codes of conduct. Reported without hat or gloves, eating in the street, or, talking to boys while in uniform meant expulsion if "caught" three times. All eyes were upon us, not only those of the ever watchful public, on behalf of the nuns who rarely left the convent grounds, but also those of the prefects whose authority was declared with a badge and whose duty it was to watch and tell. I had been conditioned to be a rule follower and like all nice girls I had learned "to fill other people's expectations" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, 1986, p. 206).

My loves were Latin and playing the piano. Each combined structure with expression. The language of both Latin and music is highly organized and structured, but I also enjoyed the verses of Cicero and Virgil which we translated with the guidance of a devoted, poetic teacher and I enjoyed playing Beethoven's sonatas which contained the expression of voice I had to restrain.

Because I defied the traditional, docile road that my scholarship had mapped out for me and took a different route, I see my letter writing as a masculine expression in the Chinese yang sense of taking the road of the warrior. It is interesting to consider that those who were warriors needed to express their vulnerability through maintaining connection with the "World" and that she who was so sheltered, needed to stop following the rules for a while and connect with another "World". However, the people of that "World" were not actually in control of their own lives, as she was becoming, but were following dictates handed down by their government and the military. Letter writing perhaps became a way for them to shake off the rigidity of living by rules as well. Engaged as we were in survival of one form or another, our letters provided us

with a medium in which to express our thoughts. It seems to me that our thought is an expression of our spirituality and the expression of our spirituality is the creation of art. I think, then, that we were artists oblivious to our craft while making sense of our worlds and figuring out what mattered with words. We spoke a universal language that both rejoined "the person to the word, and the world as well as providing a voice that (was) understood" (Butt, 1988, p.2).

> *I really did enjoy talking with you and feeding the birds. It was really refreshing to meet someone who was not too busy in the fast moving world to stop and enjoy the wonders of nature. I want to thank you again for the most enjoyable and richly rewarding portion of time I spent in Sydney.*

Chapter 2

Finding a Place for Myself and My Letters in the Literature

> The central method of ethical caring is a faithful search for understanding of the subjective aspects of experiences. (Noddings, 1986, p105)

Reflection: Letters Linking Past, Present and Future

The words in my letters provide me with images by which I can story and restory my experience. In the process I become conscious of what I believe, and understand the reasons for those beliefs which determine who I am in both my personal and professional life. I confidently begin to "claim my strengths and attempt to understand my weaknesses" (Butt, 1988 p. 1). This helps me articulate my personal practical knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) which I call upon in the day to day decisions I make on my own and with other people; my children, my husband, my friends, colleagues, children I teach, the gas attendant, salesperson at the store and stranger on the other end of the telephone, "the proximate other ... under whose gaze I fall" (Noddings, 1984, p. 113). Schon (1984), Posner (1985) and Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1990) have focused on the nature of reflection and its ability to embrace self understanding and the sense making of one's own practice performed in and around the expectation of the context of education. Noddings reminds me of the importance of reflection in informing me of the times I "failed to receive the other adequately" (1984, p.114).

> *You broke my heart. I haven't heard from you for such a long time I am wondering if you're alright. I hope you're alright. Maybe I said something that you might not have liked. If I did I am sorry ... I missed hearing from you*

Connelly and Clandinin have identified letter writing as a tool for reflection: "In letter writing there is ongoing reflection-in-action between the two participants" (1988, p. 51). The reflection-in-action about life occurred and ceased many years ago but it is as though my letters take on new life as I go back to them and reflect again, situated now in the future relative to their becoming, but preparing still for the future through looking again at the past. Through reflecting on the letters sent to me, which are only one side of the dialogue, I come to understand and more adequately articulate my truth (Bruner, 1986).

The experience of writing letters is not *the* one that shaped who I am. It is merely one text in the many texts of my life (White & Epston, 1991), a powerful text preserved in part by memory but largely by words written in letters which my memory had edited out. The letters in their authenticity also affirm for me that my choosing to take the nontraditional path was worthwhile because of what I learned about the relational aspect of being human.

Zeichner insists that reflection must be critical, that is, it must lead me, the investigator to think about my work "in relation to certain issues" (In Kennedy, 1989, p. 16). Reflection in this sense becomes a process of moral deliberation involving the ethic of duty where principles of justice and compassion are considered. Reflection also summons thought about the ethic of virtue or relational ethic What becomes important to me as a teacher is the quality of the pedagogical relation (Van Manen, 1992) as guided by deeper knowledge rather than abstract theoretical constructs.

> *What were you drinking at the free cocktail party. It was either a bourbon with coke, or whiskey and coke, or just coke. Have you ever heard the story about the third-grade boy who knew what "straight" means? Anyway, when asked by his teacher to spell "straight", he did so without error. So the teacher*

said, "Now what does it mean?" The little boy answered, "Without water." The kids can surprise you sometimes. I didn't drink at all before I got drafted in to the U.S. Army. I didn't smoke either. I smoked for about 3 months, but I quit because it never satisfied me.

Zeichner (in Kennedy,1989) further postulates that in his work with student teachers reflection and action are inseparable. Reflection brings my reasoning into focus and empowers me to articulate thoughts and feelings in order to bring about change relative to a certain situation. Robinson and Hawpe (1986) similarly claim that "reflection" on experience is what leads me to the construction of stories with new meanings. Stiles (1991), White and Epston (!990), Connelly and Clandinin (1988, 1990) Coles (1989) and Britton (1983) see the construction of new meanings as possible only after I tell and retell (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 1990) my experiences with a view to storying and restorying. I am "a reflective learner for the eventual purpose of working with children. It is their curriculum, their personal practical knowledge and narratives of experience that fall within (my) guidance" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988, p.197).

Narrative, Autobiography and Story

According to Bruner, the effort to understand my self is an interpretive one "akin to that used by an historian or an anthropologist trying to understand a 'period' or a 'people'" (1990, p. 110) and according to Butt (1988) my stories about real events are interpretations. Attwood and Stolorow (1984) indicate that empathy calls for the life experience and self knowledge of me, the researcher, to be included in the research as well as the life experience and self knowledge of the participant. It may, then, be feasible to say that what I am engaged in, as I search my letters for meaning, is an empathic (Attwood & Stolorow 1984) constructivist

(Belenky et al, 1986) interpretation (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1988, 1990; Butt, 1988; Coles, 1989; White & Epston, 1990; Stiles, 1991; Polkinghorne, 1988).

Bruner defines an autobiography as "an account of what one thinks one did in what settings in what ways for what felt reasons" (1990, p. 119) and agrees with Polkinghorne that it "will inevitably be a narrative" (p. 119), an autobiographical narrative that ultimately becomes the teller (White & Epston, 1990).

Narrative, according to Polkinghorne (1988), is the ultimate form that gives meaning to experience.

> *Well I was 21 yesterday and you know what I was doing on my birthday last night? I was in a bunker because we got hit with mortars. We had 40 rounds within 3 minutes. Well, at least I'll remember what I did on my birthday in '69 for a long time.*

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) have stated that "narrative is both phenomenon and method" (p. 2). Researchers using narrative inquiry, or "inquiry into narrative" (p. 2) collect stories, tell stories and write "narratives of experience" (p. 2). Both my autobiographical writing and my letters are data sources for narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). Stories, writes Stiles (1992), do not tend to seek meaning, to tell the "why" so much as the "what" or attempt to provide solutions and resolutions, but rather, they broaden our understandings (Coles, 1989). A good story is "a way of ordering experience" (Bruner, 1986, p. 11) and is determined for goodness by its lifelikeness (Bruner, 1986; White & Epston, 1990), its plausibility, and, coherence of events (Robinson & Hawpe 1986; White & Epston, 1990).

In case you've forgotten, I'm a guy
who 1) met you in a coffee shop
" 2) sat talking with you in the park
" 3) you kept turning down for a date
" 4) really likes Laugh-in
" 5) walked you to the station once
" 6) had a cup of coffee with you
-remember me?

Building on Bruner's distinction between the logico-scientific mode of thought and the narrative mode of thought (1986), White and Epston, in their work as therapists, promote practice that harmonizes with the narrative mode of thought which is "characterized by good stories' (1990) revealing the human condition. Stories can create new possibilities for the future. We all live in narrative, retelling and reassessing the meaning of our past actions, sometimes in conversation with others and at other times in a monologue to ourselves, as we negotiate a course to the future while situated in the middle of several incomplete stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986, 1988, 1990; White & Epston, 1990).

Narrative, then, can be the telling of stories in which I live (White & Epston, 1990; Coles, 1989), the storying that I as a researcher engages in of my own and others' stories (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990), a state of being (Polkinghorne, 1988) and a mode of thought (Bruner, 1986, 1990; White & Epston, 1990).

My main data source, the letters, may be considered narrative threads (Clandinin & Connelly, 1988) in the sense that they present a collection of images provided by people living in a warzone.

> *That moon landing was really great. We didn't see the pictures of them walking on the moon until the next day. I bet Nam was the only place in the world that didn't see them walking on the moon live when they were actually up there.*

In the sense that there is no definite closure in most cases by individual authors, that is, there is no formal ending to each collection, they may also be considered biographic chronicles (Connelly & Clandinin, 1986). The literature speaks to my involvement with the letters in this study the following way: the letters are partial narratives by persons "engaged in living, telling, retelling, and reliving stories" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4). They are also stories, "renderings of life" which "can not only keep us company, but admonish us and point us in new directions or give us the courage to stay a given course" (Coles, 1989, p.159). The authors' images of me, my story according to how they read me, determined what they wrote, what they did not write and how they wanted to be read by me since "the-story-of-a-life as told to a particular person is in some deep sense a joint product of the teller and the told" (Bruner, 1990, p. 124). As my autobiography unfolds, I weave in the collective narrative of their words. They appear like thoughts that surface and retreat, often remaining unspoken during the telling of a story. In this way I create jointly constructed meanings about myself and others, an understanding of which informs me of the connection between my personal and public self, about the professional me who is a teacher in relation and about what matters to me in life and in education.

Whether they write about narrative, autobiography or story, researchers who aspire to the narrative mode of thought lean toward the use of a common language, a universal language (Butt, 1988), natural language (Stiles, 1991), that is, a language that "rarely has sharp boundaries" (Stiles, 1991, p.12), a discourse of poetry and music (Hillman, 1983) which enables me to join the conversation (Butt, 1988). There is also agreement that the telling and retelling of stories about my own life allows for the expression of my voice; as a person with a voice I

become an empowered person with the potential to empower others (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Butt, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 1990, in press; Polkinghorne, 1988; Coles, 1989; White & Epston, 1990; Stiles, 1991). In this way I counteract my alienation "from the patriarchal authoritarianism of some traditional forms of education" (Butt, 1988, p. 39) through allowing imagination and dreams to create alternative images that are "necessarily androgynous in tone" (Butt, 1988, p. 36).

An Other Woman's Story

My knowledge is constantly changing in light of new experience:

> Knowledge is an activity which would be better described as a process of knowing. ... Research is an intensely dynamic enquiring while knowledge is a more quiet research. Both are ever on the move, according to similar principles, towards a deeper understanding of what is already known. (Polanyi in Britton, 1983, p.18)

Because of the dominance of women in my life I was barely aware that men existed and certainly not conscious of playing an inferior role to them. I remember being shy around boys I met at university (which is interesting because of the story of my letter writing), but I have almost forgotten what that was like now. Sometimes I think about the constraints I am currently under as I balance mothering, driving my children to violin lessons, track club, Cubs and CGIT, supply teaching, being secretary of the track club, as well as living the life of a fulltime graduate student with a two hundred kilometer round trip commute to the university. But my husband, Mel, shares the responsibility of parenting and housetending, not always according to my expectation but according to his own. We each have our priorities; my efforts often do not meet his expectations on

things that are not as important to me as they are to him. Nevertheless, he has always encouraged me to pursue my eternal personal quest to express myself, sometimes in, and most of the time out of the home, all the while seeking to maintain a state of harmony and balance within the family.

So I do not feel the need to write about my life from the stance of a woman who has been downtrodden by men as Heilbrun describes (1988) and as has certainly been the history of my gender (Woolf, 1929). That does not mean that I am exempt from feelings of inadequacy but they do not stem directly from men, but rather women living without men. My father left when I was three and my sister was eighteen months. My mother returned to her parents' home with her two children and "had to go to work". Grandma stayed at home, cooked the meals, and did the "housework" although she considered this latter performance a waste of time.

> *You know when we talked about "home" besides other things? ... I was thinking about this question; is not the personality of a person and the way he may feel about his life greatly influenced by the way he was raised? If a person was raised in a broken home, he has one of two ways he could live, either he is going to care, or he might know better but wouldn't care. He might care about life, take advantage of its better values, and try to correct the life he lived as a child. A good example is raising his children in a very nice family life where the child or each child is given equal and every opportunities he needs to improve his individuality and his life. On the contrary, a person might think that he is no better than his parents and give-in to a life of carelessness and lead a life as he had as a child. It works both ways.*
>
> *A person from an unbroken home is no exception. I've met some young couples, who were raised in unbroken homes, who don't care about their own home.*
>
> *Could we blame our parents for giving us a broken home, or hate the parent who caused it? After my Father told me that he doesn't have a home anymore, I <u>used to</u> blame my poor Mom for everything that wasn't right. But after my father got*

killed in an automobile accident, I felt sorry for her. I have no hard feeling toward my Mother now.

My mother often said I was just like my father. I came to view my unavailable father as someone I would like to know. I thought we would probably understand each other.

Perhaps this empathic feeling towards my father with whom I had no contact contributed to my feeling of trust with the boys from Vietnam who, interestingly, were eventually going back to the same continent that my father had moved to, and, who also were guaranteed to leave. I didn't feel the silencing by men that Rich (1979) writes about but in my childhood days I sometimes felt silenced by women who spoke with loud voices. Perhaps, in a way, we were all victims, not of men, but of a society structured along the same sort of lines that allowed such an event as the Vietnam War (Clandinin, 1992).

The research of Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) identified different knowledges (knowing) for women. In so far as I had an attitude of trust and found myself in a position of understanding rather than judging, I was a connected knower. "Connected knowing involves feeling, because it is rooted in relationship; but it also involves "thought ... care ... generous thinking and receptive rationality" (p. 120). Their research has also helped me to validate the authorization of my own text by enabling me to view myself as rational, compassionate and in control. My thoughts, my knowing, "comes not from detachment but from living in connection with" myself "and with others, from being embedded in the conditions of life" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 148). Bateson (1990) has provided me with another way to consider my nontraditional pathmaking in terms of considering my life as the creation of a composition full of improvisation. She doesn't agree with the traditional image of life as a journey

towards the attainment of the goal on the horizon because such a focused journey inhibits sidetracks along the way. The message of these writers to acknowledge control of my life is empowering, as is the call of those who write about narrative and autobiography to story, restory and share my improvisations. It seems there are many ways to begin to think of ourselves as artists when we first accept ourselves as the authors of our own lives.

Gilligan also addresses the need to listen to the differences in women's voices as we tell of our experiences and understandings (Woolf, 1929) in the hope that the recognition of difference "expands our vision of maturity and points to the contextual nature of developmental truths" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 174). But the authors of my letters from Vietnam express the same need to be accepted for who they are, to be able to write their own scripts and I wonder about the possibility that what Gilligan says here could also apply to the authors of my letters as they struggled to make sense of their lot as warriors.

Tim O'Brien, an infantryman who served in Vietnam, commented:

> It still boils down to suffering and the thing about Vietnam that bothers me is that it is treated as a political experience, a sociological experience, and the human element of what a soldier goes through - and what the Vietnamese went through - is not only neglected: it is almost cast aside as superfluous. (Maclear, 1981, p. 363)

And it's the pervading human element that I think about, that I so often see "cast aside as superfluous" in education by those consumed by standards and indicators. Similarly, I think of myself and my friends, not as girls and boys or women and men but as people. We are first of all human men and women who both have masculine and feminine capacities in the ways we relate with each other. Is it possible that the validation of both men and women's feminine ways

in terms of cooperation, caring, nurturing and providing spaces for voice, could bring about the creation of, as Christ (1986) suggests, a new vision of human nature woven together by women's threads?

When I offer, with other women (Kennedy, 1992), my experience as my truth, "as human truth" (Le Guin, 1989, p.160) I begin to imagine the guiding maps of life changing. But I think again about the fact that boys offered their experiences as truth in letters a long time ago and of the possibility that they could also contribute to such directional changes. In my script, masculine and feminine is not a matter of gender but of two ways of approaching and acting in life. The masculine way, represented by a concept of hierarchy and characterized by such things as analytical, linear thinking, competition and universal standards (Capra, 1982; Fox, 1991), has been responsible for the predicament in which some of us find ourselves unheard and mistreated at the expense of others. I wonder what a vision of human nature would look like if, instead of seeing men as dominant over women and keeping them subdued, we viewed this domination as a way of thinking (Woolf, 1929; Gilligan, 1982; Bateson, 1990) about a world that enables some people (both men and women) to behave in a superior way to others and some people (both men and women) to respond in an inferior way to others. Gilligan (1982) points out that the feminine is characterized by a caretaking, nurturing role which in order to work well requires an understanding of how to also care for self. Perhaps we have to form new understandings about what it means to care for self relative to others.

Capra looks to nature for guidance in understanding our relationship to others and our world:

> ... ecosystems sustain themselves in a dynamic balance based on cycles and fluctuations, which are

> nonlinear processes ... ecological awareness, then will arise only when we combine our rational knowledge with an intuition for the nonlinear nature of our environment. (1982, p. 41)

Similarly Noddings has urged us "to care for humans and animals directly ... and to care for people indirectly through maintenance of the environment" (1984, p.187). Both Capra (1982, 1986), a physicist, and Fox (1991), a theologian, are men writing to promote the feminine view in science and spirituality. Both acknowledge the writings of women such as Dillard (1974, 1989) in bringing awareness to the conditions of inequality and both acknowledge the connection of our way of thinking to the environment and the way it is affected by such thought.

> *Well, I'm now at Vung Tau, South Vietnam and believe me it's no holiday camp. It's the dirtiest rotton hole of a country I've ever seen. Although I've only just arrived what I have seen is not very nice. The people live in tin sheds made from scrap tin, iron and cardboard, and it looks as if they haven't washed for years. Even the streets stink. The first thing I noticed when we hopped off the plane at Saigon was the smell. We spent most of yesterday at the big American Air Base at Saigon, and you've got no idea of the vehicles or aircraft that are just lying around.*

Chapter 3

Preparing for Reflection on the Letters

> As a miner picks up a rock, turning it to look for gold, so must a researcher look for the worth of information encountered in the research process. In one sense, then ordinary events become data when approached from a particular frame of mind - that of a researcher. (Bogdan & Biklin, 1992, p.106)

I have photocopied each of my letters from Vietnam twice. One set is arranged by author and placed chronologically according to the date on his first letter. The second set is arranged according to the date on each letter and hence, in the order that I received them.

My desire is to illuminate the understandings provided by rereading and reflecting on the letters of my Vietnam experience. Asking questions and seeking understanding through the answers to those questions was a major aspect of the letter writing story. Larry, who died before I received his letter wrote:

Just keep asking questions I'll answer them if I can.

Part of my understanding will be formed by answering questions in the letters written to me from Vietnam at a distance, provided not only by space, but also time and lived experience. There are a number of directions I could explore with these letters. One direction would involve looking at individual authors as characters in their own script about war; another direction would involve illuminating common themes emerging from the letters as a whole. In the latter approach I would describe a collage of the authors' implied meanings from individual uses and references, looking for commonalities and differences, while weaving in my perspective as it has developed from then until now. Since March,

1992, I have dialogue journaled extensively with my advisor on my reflections, thoughts and story of 1968, 1969 and 1970. I have reread all the letters and, without searching, I know that there are many references to friendship, resistance, caring, time, life in a warzone and dreams. I am reluctant to even write this as once I start REreading the letters with a view to REsearching them, I may be led to a more fitting (Butt, 1988; Coles, 1989; Stiles, 1991) way to make sense of the information. Obviously I will be "continually trying to give an account of the multiple levels ... at which the enquiry proceeds" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) and there will be some difficult decisions to be made about what directions to pursue at the expense of others (Kennedy, 1992).

This is not collaborative research for I cannot check with the authors for the reliability of my understandings. Accordingly, validity has to be measured in the feasibility, the feeling of rightness, that my eventual story generates (Bruner, 1986, 1990; Butt, 1988; Clandinin & Connelly, 1988, 1990; Polkinghorne, 1988; Coles, 1989; White & Epston, 1990; Stiles, 1991). Accordingly, I feel like the reader of a text when I read my letters, a reader who must in the end, write for myself what I "intend to do with the actual text" (Bruner, 1986, p. 24). What I intend to do with the actual text, the letters, will only become apparent when I reread them as a researcher, consciously searching for connection and meaning but at the same time allowing them to speak to me with their own voice.

Duty with Honor

Wanting to reinforce the concept of letter writing as an artistic expression that also has a pedagogical function, I originally planned writing my proposal and thesis in the form of a letter. However, the authors of the letters have taken

over that format as they begin to write themselves collectively into my story.

As I reread these letters I have a strong appreciation for the devotion and regard with which I was bestowed. Our lives are separate now but as they write their letter in my thesis, I am mindful of keeping sacred that sense of devotion by guarding their identities.

At first this posed a moral dilemma for me because I didn't like to deny them their individuality and personhood. However, while I wish to reveal and share the lessons of the letters, I can only do it honorably in a collective sense. Excerpts from the letters will be included in my thesis. Names will not.

It is difficult for me to know how best to refer to them as part of a composite which protects their identities to the point of not even being individualized by pseudonyms. I am drawn to the word "friends". The word "authors" seems too impersonal when making sense of words from such intimate data as my own personal letters in which people have shared their inner thoughts and feelings and, through response, challenged me to also share my inner thoughts and feelings in a mutual attempt at making sense of our worlds. The word "friends" also embodies a sense of trust and protection which as a researcher, I wish to ensure. If I keep the concept of friendship in mind when I refer to the authors of my letters, then I am mindful of remaining faithful to their words. So while the authors of my letters are not friends in that they are no longer in my life, they are friends in the personal sense that they once shared their thoughts and feelings with me in relationships of trust.

As I write now as a researcher I align myself with that trust through a desire to remain faithful in constructing a reflective interpretation of how I came to an understanding of who I am as a teacher who lives in relation with people.

Having said that, I sense a dilemma emerging, as the word "friend" may not always feel appropriate. It may be too naive of me to refer to people who are no longer in my life as friends. They may not now wish to be regarded as friends, although I feel they would not mind. It is hard to know without asking. What word should I use, then, to describe people without names, not even pseudonyms? Perhaps I should trust that it will be obvious to whom I am referring, even should I sometimes use the word "friends", at other times "authors", and yet other times "letter writers". Other appropriate words may arise as I progress with this work. The important point is that a spirit of trust inspired by the concept of friendship guides this study.

One of my author/letter writer friends sent me a birthday card which asks the question What is a Friend? The answer on the card is as follows:

A friend is a person
of great understanding
Who shares all our hopes and schemes,
A companion who listens
with infinite patience
To all of our plans and our dreams,
A true friend can make all our cares melt away
With the touch of a hand or a smile,
And with calm reassurance
make everything brighter,
And life always seem more worthwhile

A friend shares so many bright
moments of laughter
At even the tiniest thing
What memorable hours
of light-hearted gladness
And pleasure this sharing can bring!
A friend is a cherished possession
Who knows all our hopes and our fears,
And someone to treasure
deep down in our hearts
With a closeness that grows through the years!
(Author Unknown)

And yes I see that we were friends. My only doubt is raised by the last line

"With a closeness that grows through the years" and I wonder if that closeness can embrace the sort of closeness induced by reflection despite the physical absence of the other. I think it can. Friendship becomes a word, then, to describe how I live my past, present and future in relation with people.

Samples says that to honor "is to treat seriously, to attend to" (1987, p. 9). I am ever mindful of the terrible predicament in which some veterans found themselves and the torment they had to face during readjustment to the society whose government betrayed them (Maclear, 1981). I will not betray them and I will attend to, and treat their words seriously in the hope that perhaps, in some small way, sharing their letters may contribute to the healing process by describing the knowledge as meaning as truth (Bruner, 1986) they helped me to form.

> *War is not the most beautiful sight but the ultimate aims are more important than basic military aims. I just hope and pray that the war ends, but if it doesn't I hope the Allies' aims stay the same; for if they don't all we have accomplished will go down the drain.*

Reaching Back

After I presented my proposal for this study to a research class of graduate students and interested staff, I received a phonecall from a staff member concerned about the ethical considerations of using my letters. It was then suggested that I contact all the letter writers and seek their permission to use their letters. This would have been an almost impossible task. People move. I could not hire a private detective to trace these people down, nor would I wish to trace them down. I had no idea where they were up to in their lives or what memories a person contacting them from the same time frame as their Vietnam

experience could trigger.

Furthermore this was my story I was to tell, not theirs, excerpts were to be used with no dates and no names. The writers are unidentifiable. I had a sense that should one of the writers read my thesis that they would not be able to recognize their own words. I know I would have difficulty recognizing the words that I wrote twenty three to twenty five years ago. This dilemma took place before I submitted my ethics review application. Once reviewed along the normal lines of procedure, my application was approved without question. However, I began to think about how the writers would view my work, the story I would tell of my life through memory triggered by words they wrote to me and words triggered by thoughts of such memories. How would they feel about what I am saying? Would they think I had taken a naive view? Would my words speak to them? Would my words harmonize with their thoughts and feelings? Could they take offense at my perspective? As a researcher, researching self in narrative, I found the writing of this thesis to be both an extremely fulfilling experience as well as a lonely one. I envied others who could return to the research environment and check their interpretation with those who had offered their words and insights for somebody else's thesis. Moreover I knew I had a rich data source but I couldn't use it the way other researchers use their data because it was my story I was telling.

Telling my own story empowered me to make my own decision to contact one of the writers in the hope of answering my questions. I chose a contact, phoned information for the number of his parents' farm address of twenty four years ago in order to check if they were still there and unexpectedly received the recorded phone number. It was not without a sense of the risk involved in

contacting someone from the past who served in Vietnam and who was leading a life I knew nothing about, that I eventually phoned this given number. His niece answered and gave me his home number. He had moved extensively and was now living in another state.

It would have been easier not to phone at all, but I required a response to my proposal from someone who shared my story. Living in Canada, there was no one remotely connected except for the odd person I would hear about who had crossed the border to avoid the draft but I didn't think for my purposes here that we would have much in common.

I dialed the number very nervously not knowing what to expect. I was relieved when a male voice answered and I was reaffirmed when after introducing myself, I heard back my full name: first, middle and birth name with a fondness that indicated that this was a good thing to do. I explained my purpose for the contact and sent him a copy of my proposal.

In a later phonecall he said that he saw himself in all the letters but could not identify his own. This was good. He concluded his written comments on my proposal with support for the perspective I had taken and added his seal of approval with the words "I hope your thesis is a tangible measurement of what we can learn from people, experiences and life" (Meyer,1993).

He told me of others of our generation whom he has met and who continue to carry around their own personal "shrapnel in the heart" (Palmer, 1987) from the experience that was Vietnam: an army nurse who cared for the men in his unit, an airline hostess who worked on planes transporting troops to and from Vietnam, veterans whom he sees daily in his work with the Department of Veterans' Affairs. Most of our generation have a Vietnam experience that we

carry around with us whether around having been there, around having demonstrated on campuses about being there, around having loved ones go over there, around avoiding going there, around writing to people over there. I have a sense that the sharing of our stories can help to ease the pain for those of our generation for whom Vietnam was an experience. I am not saying we should remove the scars for the scars have been earned and can serve as a reminder of what was and what could be. Do we want the same for our children?

> *You know how Jim and I told you we met and that the army was its own little world? Well I was sitting in our non-commissioned officers club writing and this guy came in and sat at my table. I knew I recognized him and we finally figured out where we met. He was a crew-chief on a helicopter that was forced down due to mechanical failure a few months ago, and I took my squad out to secure it until it could be recovered.*

Chapter 4

Life as War as Classroom as Movie as Life

> We didn't know our ally. Secondly, we knew even less about the enemy. And the last, most inexcusable of our mistakes was not knowing our own people. (General Maxwell Davenport Taylor in Maclear, 1981, p. 474)

John Wayne Alias Whats-'s-name

There is a link between my adolescent observations and the way I came to think about what I do in schools and why and how I do it. My experience is offered here as my truth (Le Guin, 1989; Bruner, 1986, 1990). It is not generalizable but it may speak to you as it does to me or it may speak to me as it does to you because "there are no causes to be grasped with certainty where the act of meaning is concerned, only acts, expression, and contexts to be interpreted" (Bruner, 1990, p. 118).

It seemed to me that the military had stripped their personnel of individual identity in order for the machine to operate effectively. Hence, it was very easy to tell at a glance who was an American on R&R: he had short hair, in the daytime wore an open necked short sleeved shirt, often a light color, sometimes with stripes, and long trousers, and a suit and tie at night. He mostly walked with a buddy and left a stream of BRUT in the air as he passed. He looked very clean, fit and healthy. His social manner was impeccable and he was always leaving. "You're a representative of your government, don't get into trouble, and be ready to go back to Vietnam in five days" (Van Devanter, 1983, p. 203).

There was little room for individual self expression in personal appearance. Individual backgrounds and previous contexts were not significantly apparent.

Just think only 71 days left in the Army. Wow. It seems like I've been in the army a lifetime. Shortly I'll be able to grow my hair nice and long.

A multitude of stereotypical images had been replaced by a conforming "other" created by the military and it's government's decision to commit their country's "best and finest" to a warzone. The John Wayne image worked for some people but I wonder how long it lasted after returning to the "World."

After leaving Cambodia we were given four days of leisure and rest. Tonite being the last night everything is up for grabs. Tomorrow is another day and back to the field I go. Last week our battalion found the largest cache of the Vietnam war. We had piles and piles of ammo stacked up. All sorts of generals and congressmen came out to see our unbelievable findings. So we are all walking around with our noses stuck high in the air.

Michael Herr, a correspondent who wrote about his experiences and observations in Vietnam, compacts the scene this way:

> ... it was experience. Life-as-movie, war-as-(war)movie, war-as-life; a complete process if you got to complete it (1978, p. 58).

I met people whom I might not otherwise have met because our schooling backgrounds were different, good preparation for the reality of working with children I would have in my classes whose backgrounds would be different than mine. Some philosophers and theologians (Capra, 1982, 1988; Grof, Laing, Simonton in Capra, 1988; Bateson, 1990, Fox 1991) see the connection between acknowledging diversity and learning to understand our interconnectedness. Society, however, has a way of turning difference into inequality which leads to a valuing of symmetry over interconnectedness and keeps us apart from each other

(Bateson, 1990). It wasn't until the first letter arrived that I was able to tell what sort of educational experience the author had lived and to sometimes realize that in "ordinary life" we may never have met.

> *I haven't got time to write but here's 2 pictures*
>
> *I have been doing a lot of thinking the past two days and I think I can get my diploma for the 6th grade while I am in the army ...*

Learning From The Letters

While I think, as a friend, about the context in which each author existed in the "World" before the military and Vietnam, I think also as a teacher, about the diversity of contexts in which the children in my classes have lived. The letters are diverse in their expression of thought and they reveal so much more than the outward, physical appearance of a person. Particularly, they reveal in their diversity, a universal need for both expression and connection. Should we look more carefully at what is written from a warzone? Are the same messages in Farley Mowat's letters written during WWII and published in his book, My Father's Son, Memories of War and Peace, the letters that Sandra Gwyn has used for her book on WWI, Tapestry of War and my collection of letters from Vietnam? I suspect that there may be similarity in the messages from these wars, but my letters have also taught me in a more specific way.

Prior to my letter writing experience, or as I sometimes think of it, *my* Vietnam experience, I had a bias about spelling: simply put, "if a person couldn't spell then they weren't very bright." If they weren't very bright (because they couldn't spell), then they also couldn't think adequately to be "successful" in life. After receiving letters from "poor spellers" I changed my opinion on the

connection between spelling and quality of thought.

> *Wow I realy dont no what to say becuse I dident realy get to no you that well ... that's about all the news from here so I will make like an artest and draw this picture to a cloths. Take cair and write soon.*

Are the good spellers, the ones with an "education" and an understanding of the rules of grammar, the only ones with something worthwhile to say? How "efficient" are only a few misspelled words at representing how a person feels and what they want to say? Dixon and Stratta (1986), identified unifying and coherent elements in plot and character development of stories which may at first reading be considered poor quality but which when read with understanding begin "to feel like the texture of actual lived-through experience" (p. 11). My thoughts about spelling came from a dominant cultural view that valued correct spelling. It is now recognized that the emphasis on the mechanics of writing often sacrifices the flow of the expression of thought.

As I reflect on my Vietnam experience, I wonder about how powerful a culture is in ensuring that its members maintain it and operate within its guidelines. The military achieves it by enforcing obedience to a strict military code of behavior that turns people into "instruments of some other, alien force that would have me destroy rather than reaching out receptively to the other" (Noddings, 1984, p.115). Society achieves it by framing a norm and stereotyping persons and behavior in and out of the norm. Education likewise achieves it by diagnosing and labelling children around a norm of accomplishment and behavior referred to as standards.

I am restorying (Bruner, 1990; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; White & Epston, 1990) this period of my life as an experience in learning (Dewey, 1936)

about being human through the maintenance of connection provided by the medium of letters. It is through reflection and restorying that I can begin to articulate what is important to me as a teacher. My Vietnam experience, for it involves the meeting of my friends as well as the correspondence with them, was an experience in caring, tolerance and connection. It also led me to wonder about the maintenance of control by the dominant culture and the subjugation of people through the practice of stereotyping and objectification (White, 1990).

These insights and wonders which have shaped the person I am have made me a "knowledgeable" character in the script I write about teaching. I become "knowledgeable" about my own teaching as I reflect upon and seek meaning from my own experience. I did not gain my knowledge in a teacher training course; nobody taught it to me in the traditional sense. It entered through my senses and lodged somewhere in my brain without me even being aware it had happened. Polanyi (1966) combines mind, body and "World" this way: "Our own body is the only thing in the world which we ... experience always in terms of the world to which we are attending from our body" (p.16).

I taught "gifted" children for two years and thought about the label. A requirement for acceptance to the program was an IQ score of 130. One of my students scored 129 and the psychologist who administered the test advised against admitting her to the program based on an argument about the necessity of maintaining standards. I felt uncomfortable with this, but I had not yet reflected on my life experiences and could not express the absurdity I felt about such a decision.

The next year I visited the home of a girl in grade five who had "made it" into the gifted program. Her mother was appalled at the implication for her four

other children if Rhonda was "labelled gifted." It brought about another awakening. She demanded to know what "gifted" meant and the wisdom of her words began to haunt me and seep into the well of my understanding until I realized she was right. If these children were "gifted" then what were the other children? What was their unspoken label?

What stories will enable the creation of an image of life and education without the labels? I wonder about the stories that exist in the intangible spaces, the stories that are created through relationships with others and whether they hold this possibility: "Apart from our relations to other people, there can be no moral necessity" (Piaget in Lyons, 1990), apart perhaps, I would add, from sharing the sensemaking and connectedness of one's own life. There was no mention of relationship or discussion about "important" matters at Teachers' College (or maybe those classes were the ones I missed!). If Piaget is right, then why isn't the teacher/learner or pedagogical relation (van Manen, 1992) at the heart of teacher education classes particularly if, as Williams suggests "the ultimate test of a person's worth as a doctor or teacher or lawyer has to do not only with what he or she knows, but with how he or she behaves with another person, the patient or student or client" (in Coles, 1989, p. 119)? What is more "of the essence" than coming to understand our interconnectedness (Capra, 1982, 1988; Bateson, 1990; Fox, 1991)?

Amidst a story of underachievement my final "practice teaching" assessment was "Outstanding" and was accredited to only one other person in the year. On the basis of that, I was offered a position in a progressive school. But I turned it down feeling I didn't know enough, conscious of my poor attitude to academic life, and wondering about whether or not I actually had missed

something worthwhile. I thoroughly enjoyed "practice teaching" but I didn't yet see that the reason for my 'successful" appraisal had something to do with having developed a basic respect for other people. I am forever (that word, "forever") trying to understand who I am with people and who they are with me, trying not to miss what's important and to let go of what isn't. How did my Vietnam experience help to shape the way I think about these things?

The Letters Take on a Life of Their Own

I have shared a selection of these letters with grade seven classes who were studying war in Language and Social Studies, or peace in Religion and Health. The children connected in a special way with the firsthand narratives of the authors as I read their letters. They wanted to respond to these authors and asked if it was possible to write to them.

I am always moved in these sharing sessions by the children's total absorption even though Canada was not involved in the Vietnam war/conflict/experience. I often think about how long the letters spent on my closet floor in Australia where they were stored for so many years and how they now seem to be taking on a life of their own almost against all odds, powerfully reaching into the hearts and minds of those who hear them. I am also intrigued at how the letters live on but have not remained constant. Their meanings have changed. I see things I didn't see before and as they/I change, I ask more questions: How can these letters emerge after all these years? Who listened when I said "I have these letters" and why? What is it about the tone of the personal letter that enables my letters to speak with such a strong voice to Canadian children who have no immediate connection with the Vietnam war? Who are the

letter writers? What are they saying? How can they speak with a collective voice? How did they choose what words to write? Do their letters represent their deepest thoughts even when they were conscious of trying not to? I think I know who I was/am but is that the same person in the letters? How is the way others write me the same or different than the way I write myself? How does the image portrayed in adolescence compare with who I am now? I would ask the same questions about the authors of my letters but this is not possible. Is there a difference between who I am as a person and who I am as a teacher? What do people who are living in the imminence of death teach us about what matters?

When I see in the children's eyes a connection with the letters, I think of the authors at their age and how far away the concept of war would have been to them then. We talk about the value of writing letters. One conscientious teacher gave them an assignment: write a letter "from the field". This bothered me. I didn't want those young people to write as though they were "there". Their experience was on the homefront. I thought again about the fact that the authors of my letters were the age of these children not long before I met them, oblivious, as were their mothers, to their forthcoming Vietnam experience. I panicked. They could read about it, they could hear about it, they could think about it, they could author their own lives from the homefront, but I didn't want them to ever have to write it from the field ... I am the mother of two daughters and a son ... not even in fiction. I hope for world peace and wonder where it begins, who can make it possible, and who prevents us from living it.

> *After completing my education I think I'd like to visit England and Europe. Of course, the way things are going in the Mid-East, there is no telling when I may be going there unintentionally.*
>
> *I don't think the US will get involved there but if they do I see no escape for myself. But, if it*

does happen I refuse to be in the lower ranks again.

Isn't it strange how the world gets all bungled up in knots over a war which has been going on for centuries. Some historians have said that the next world war will start in the Mid East.

The way it looks now, it's going to be a very long time before men learn to live in peace. A very long time that is, if man ever learns to live in peace.

I feel it is important for me to share my letters with children because they illustrate firsthand the reality of the human condition of war and also inform them of the circumstance of war which leads to a reflection on what it means to have really "been there." Hollywood versions and Ninja Turtle violence tend to inspire a play attitude to war and killing, but the letters in their sometimes groping-for-connection simplicity manage to tell it like it is. The following was written by a grade seven boy after I had shared the letters with his class:

> I learned that war isn't as fun as I thought.
> I thought you just went there and blew people away but your letters taught us that there was lots of pain and suffering too. (Personal Communication, January, 1993).

Leif Means Beloved

Leif is my last child and my only son. I write his story because I am afraid of the cultural pressure on him to grow up to "be a man". I am not afraid for my girls. They are already strong and independent nurturers. He nursed for four years. It was my feeling that our nursing relationship end naturally rather than me "taking him off" the breast at the acceptable twelve months or so, a decision influenced by the distress caused in following the acceptable timetable of weaning my first daughter, Jessica. I am very close to my children. I feel their joy and their pain.

Leif has my pale skin and my freckles. We even have the same visible vein

running down the middle of our foreheads. We feel deeply in the same way. He cries when he is hurt or misunderstood and I know how he is feeling. Lately I have watched his eyes redden as he struggles to keep back his watery show of grief, his feminine, watery show of grief. I hold him and I sense his relief as his centeredness returns and he composes himself. I wonder if it is good for him to restrain the natural demonstration of his emotion and I wonder why he is doing that now. What and how has he learned about being a boy and crying?

> *There was so much I wanted to say but the words just wouldn't come out and time wasn't on my side at all. I could have died on the plane back to Vietnam and to tell you the truth I almost cried. Maybe I've just been over here too long but I'm pretty sure that isn't it at all.*

My son is a male but he is very much like me, his mother. I am a female, but I am very much like him, my son. We are both male and female. Mel supports him in baseball, Cubs, skating, diving and doing experiments. I accompany his violin group on the piano, cook with him, talk with him, read with him and laugh with him. He is very musical. By that I mean he has a good ear for pitch, good coordination, a feeling for rhythm and his memory allows him to learn quickly. As well as playing the violin, he sings in the music festival and around the house. I wonder if he will be able to continue his love for music and still be accepted as one of the boys or if he will be considered "uncool" or maybe even a "wimp" if he does not become a hockey player.

> *As for that letter I asked you to take to the Whiskey, don't worry about calling to find out if she got it. I'm not worried. The more I think about it, the less cool I think she is. If she gets it then fine, if she doesn't, that's alright too.*

I have no feeling for him to become a hockey player. There is something artificial

about it that bothers me. Perhaps it's because I can't skate myself and am uncomfortable on the ice, but I don't think that's it. I love to see my children skating, enraptured in a pastime that is so difficult for me to truly enjoy as I struggle to stay upright.

I think my concern is borne out of an objection to an early conditioning to competition and roughness, the sort of roughness that might view other forms of violence as acceptable, the sort of violence that kills innocent people in the name of political freedom, the sort of violence that dehumanizes people and keeps us apart from each other.

I have been participating in music festivals in some form or another for most of my life. I have gone full circle on the question of competition in these festivals several times. Currently, I believe that we are deceiving ourselves and our children by calling these occasions festivals and not competitions. Adjudicators consistently stand up at the end of every class and say "I hate to have to do this but it is the rule of the festival that I award a first place to somebody and on this occasion it goes to" and everybody holds their breath until the name is mentioned. Organisers likewise insist that the competition is not important and as teachers we tell this to our children but at the end of the day one certificate has a gold seal placed on it and we all know that it really was a competition after all. It's nice to win. Of course it's nice to win and even though they tell us that we are all winners because we have done this thing of participating, we wonder why we all don't have gold seals on our certificates.

> *My Company is going to Florida for 3 weeks to play the part of the "BAD GUYS" for some new troops. It's really a drag cause the BAD GUYS never win.*

I feel that we have come to believe in our society that competition brings

out the best in us, that without competition standards will go down. I don't agree. I think this is one of the great myths of our time. I believe competition in music festivals is appealing only for those who thrive on the temporary recognition that winning brings. I would like the gold seal done away with so that we truly can participate in music festivals and share our talents and learn from the talents of others without the desire to be better, or recognized as better than another soloist, duet, ensemble or choir. I agree with Noddings when she says that many of our practices with children emulate and perpetuate patriarchy:

> So many of the practices embedded in the masculine curriculum masquerade as essential to the maintenance of standards (1984, p.194).

Jessica enjoys participating in track events and team sports. It is an enjoyment that is alien to me. In track events she challenges herself and knows that achievement is up to her, that if she does not win on one occasion she must try harder on the next. Her Grandfather is of the opinion that such participation will prepare her to enter the competitive world of business and politics. I can appreciate the value of cooperatively working with others but at the same time I wonder about the "we" and "they" consequence of being on a team. I have never heard her put her opponents down. In her team sports the emphasis is on every team member doing her best. Does competition make her strive harder? Is there a legitimate place for non contact team sports in our culture? As I question with my mother (Noddings, 1984; Le Guin, 1989; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule,1986) voice, I speak with a view to acknowledging the feminine lean to relatedness and cooperation in all of us, girls and boys, women and men.

> *If you ever put in for an exchange student, would you promise me you'll look me up or write my folks, or*

mother a letter so she can get a hold of me, ok. I live in California but my mother and sisters live in Washington. My father is dead so it's just my mother and we're very close and always in close touch. Here's her address.

Does it matter what I want for my children? Do I know what is right for them or not right for them? Mel has just read what I have written here. He is concerned that I should appear to be taking all the credit for our son's softness and feels that it comes from him, that maybe Leif gets his feminine self from his father. I am at once moved, impressed and appreciative of the lead-in to a reflection on the feminine aspect of both men and women which is nested in a desire to care and be cared for and which "strives consistently to capture our human intuitions and feelings" (Noddings, 1984, p.151). I remind him that he doesn't express his feelings as openly as Leif and he talks about conditioning, about living by the expectations set out by the culture in which we live. It's very simple: it's just not masculine to be feminine. To be feminine is to be weak. After a discussion of what it means to be feminine, he agrees that the feminine is associated with caring, with feeling, with responding, with valuing relationship and with being open and honest. Mel laments the outward suppression of his feminine self and yet he is proud that it is still in him *deep down inside beneath his shell* and I sense he is ready to show it.

We received a letter from our son telling us of his wonderful trip to Sydney. It was so good to know that he was happy if only for a while. This has been a very long year for all of us. We do thank you and your mother for giving him a happy relaxed time while he was on leave. This is a very happy day for us as he called us last night and will be home by the middle of the week. He sounded so good and we are very thankful.

As you might guess we are very close to our son and both of us are upset when he is not happy. We want him to be able to finish his one goal of becoming a doctor and have a happy marriage. He

must do this himself without any decisions from us. He has always had to make his own so we know he will attain this one.

Thank you again for being so nice. I only hope I can do the same for someone.

We are both aware now of the need to nurture Leif's feminine side. I wonder if the rest of our culture is ready to move beyond the "sissy" myth associated with over-mothering boys. As parents we are ready to move on. Just recently I watched a television documentary on the massacre at MyLai.

Do you know what our orders were. Shoot anyone that runs ...

MyLai is a reminder of the horror of Vietnam, of war and its association with feeling nothing, with hate and being hated, with anger and betrayal of the human spirit. Many members of the company responsible were interviewed. Some were permanently damaged as a result of losing themselves in the situation. One soldier told a different story. He refused to shoot despite pending court martial. When interviewed, he spoke of having held a baby and wondered about the experiences of the people who shot *people, human beings* and committed other atrocities against women and children, fellow humans. Hadn't they held a baby, or cuddled a child?

Every letter I get from my Mom is concentrated on telling me about my sister's baby.

Similarly, a helicopter pilot, when called to the scene was so appalled at what he saw he was ready to begin firing on his own men if they didn't stop. He was a father and he rescued from a ditch a little girl, whom he thought was a boy and who was about his son's age.

Just about everyone that gets on that leave

bus is drunk and sing and rave on or tell me how to drive the bus. I think the best run of all is the Cat-lo run which is driving the Vietnamese people who work in our camp, from Cat-lo to work and home again. I have got to know the Vietnamese people quite well on this run and I hope to get to know them much better by the time I get out of Vietnam.

The people of Vietnam are different than us, not only in looks but the way that they live and even the way they think. The South Vietnamese people are only small people. Most of them are about 5 ft. 4 in. tall and weigh only about 112 lbs. So as you can see they are not very big. The hardest part of driving the Vietnamese around is working out what they are saying. They try to tell me what is going on in town or what they have been doing. Some of them ask about where I am from. So I am getting to know about them and their country and they are getting to know about mine and I think it is just great to have the chance to get to know the people of Vietnam

I need to mother my son. Mel needs to mother his son. Our son needs to nurture, to feel compassion, to feel beauty, to feel love, to appreciate difference, to learn what it means to live in relation, to feel pain at injustice, to get in touch with what is inside of him, his feminine, intuitive self which tells him that to kill, to maim, to hurt is wrong and out of rhythm with the natural flow of his humaneness. The incident, the slaughter at MyLai was in direct violation of the Geneva convention "which makes it a crime to harm any non-combatant or, for that matter, even a combatant who has laid down his arms because of wounds or sickness" (Peck, 1983, p.213). Peck makes an interesting case about why people hand over their individuality in groups. He claims that we are quite capable of acting responsibly on our own but in a group setting we all too willingly hand over leadership to others because of laziness and a reluctance to assume the risk and responsibility ourselves. Allowing others to lead me, then, excuses me from examining my personal actions since the decision to act is decided by another who knows what is appropriate action in what settings. As a teacher it is quite within my capacity to create followers if I dictate the rules to them, or

independent thinkers if I encourage children to look at things up and down, in and out and around and about, letting them know that there are many ways to view an event or an idea.

Recently Leif told us of being teased about his name by an older boy who wanted to know what sort of a name that was, inferring that our son is perhaps related to a tree. I found that an interesting thought while at the same time conscious of the devastation he felt at the ridiculing of his name. How do children learn to say cruel things and why do some get pleasure out of seeing others feel uncomfortable? Where is the mother voice (Noddings, 1984) in our culture? Can our boys learn to speak with a (m)other tongue (Le Guin, (1989) and feel with a mother's love?

> *Don't worry about not answering my letter right away. I know how it is. I could never write when I was at home but since I've been over here that's all a person can do is write ... Don't lose this letter because there are a lot of questions I would like you to answer.*

Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule (1986) and Noddings (1984) have talked about the centrality of asking questions and receiving answers, or question posing to maternal practice. Speaking with a mother voice takes effort yet I feel with these authors that the effort taken is worth every heard word and every question asked:

> Parents who enter into a dialogue with their children, who draw out and respect their opinions are more likely to have children whose intellectual and ethical development proceeds rapidly and surely (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger and Tarule, 1986, p.189).

Leif is a Norwegian name that means Beloved. It is the name his father

and I gave to our son, our beloved son.

Chapter 5

Deep Down Inside Beneath My Shell

It is obvious that being in a warzone, the people with whom I corresponded performed jobs designated by the military in order for the machine to function efficiently with the ultimate purpose of suppressing the enemy, the communists, the VC and the North Vietnamese in order to win the war. Some sat at desks and did paper work varying from processing R&R flights to processing personnel, some worked in triage, some drove trucks, some drove tractors, some worked on advisory teams training Vietnamese troops, some transported troops in buses, some worked as medics in the field, some survived the experience of being in the field, some flew helicopters, some were helicopter gunners, some received orders and in turn gave orders. All received orders and carried them out.

> *It seems like only a few days ago that I wrote to you but its been almost 2 weeks, approaching 3. It's really been rugged, and I've been jumping around Vietnam like a jack rabbit. We've had a bad case of ground and flying accidents, so I've had to go out to our sites, visit with the people, investigate the accidents and maybe bring them some cheer from our place.*

The jobs that these people performed as military personnel, that is, what they did, assisted in identifying who they were as visible people who were part of a conglomerate that was the military machine. I have already spoken about my observations of how the military de-individualized/de-personalized people through a dress and appearance code. This took care of management on the outside. The attempt to inhibit self expression denied what was on the inside. What was on the inside was what a person thought, how he felt and what he believed. My letters tell me that making an individual conform to standards and

codes of behavior that speak against what a person believes can cause conflict since conformity on the outside does not necessarily mean conformity on the inside.

> *There really isn't too much a guy can write about over here except to say that I hate every minute of it and can't wait to get home again.*

Noddings (1984) has suggested that obedience to an ethical elite such as the military may diminish another's ethical ideal. By ethical ideal, she means the natural leaning towards a feeling of joy that occurs when we receive others in relation with one another and that is borne out of a memory of our most tender moments of being cared for and cherished. Obedience "tends to reduce ... individual responsibility and the reflection necessary ... to make ... decisions" (p.116). Following rules, acted out in the form of obedience, is what allowed the military machine to function efficiently. Yet the diminishing of my friends' ethical ideal to care is perhaps another reason why they chose to write letters. Letters served to connect them with the outside and gave them the opportunity to reflect upon their own condition as well as to show care in a written dialogue that was dependent upon response.

> *You said before I that I should be a writer. I never thought of being a writer, but I've written several pages on my own experiences and life.*

My letters gave me glimpses of what was going on in the inside, what people really thought, what they really felt. Sometimes the messages, the self came through between the lines, because there was a sense that what they wanted to say was in fact, not to be said: *I shouldn't be saying these things, it's just the way I feel* as though "just the way I feel" was unimportant, irrelevant, perhaps

not manly or in the best interests of the overall purpose.

> *I hope you understand me because it seems hard for me to express some of my feelings about different things.*

It gives me comfort to know that even when a person's ethical ideal is diminished by an ethical elite (Noddings, 1984) which assumes an all-knowingness, that the self struggles to come through as it did in the letters written by my friends from Vietnam.

> *I hope you've written already as a letter from you would make things a little easier to accept over here. I've been confronted with the possibility of going back to the field before, but I'm afraid ... I just can't rationalize such an action. I feel like I've done my part and I'm ready to get back to the real world of civilization and live life as it was meant to be.*

This newly found understanding explains why they hated the army and hated being in Vietnam apart from living in danger of losing their lives. It also helps me to understand the Armageddon referred to on page 13 of this thesis when warriors are given the permission to do things in war that goes against their personal ethical ideals.

Just Keep Asking Questions I'll Answer Them If I Can

As I read and reread the letters, various themes presented themselves as representative, not of what appeared on the outside, but of what was on the inside *deep down beneath my shell.* I have described letter writing as an artistic form by linking the expression of thought to the expression of spirituality. Therefore, it seems to me that what they did there in the sense of assisting the machine was not as important personally as what they felt and what they thought about while

there.

> *Really hated to put back on the Marine Corps uniform. Don't forget to pray for me, okay.*

I was not there, would never be there, would never see what they did there. But I came to know how they felt about being there, what they thought about while there and what was important to them while there.

One of my intentions in writing this thesis was to find out what was important and as I sense another awakening it becomes apparent to me that staying in touch with what was on the inside, holding on through letters to the essence of who they were for fear of totally losing themselves in the muck created by obedience to a machine that itself had no inside, became what was important.

> *Remember last Monday we went for a walk in the park. Well tonight I'm going for a walk but not to a park I'm going on ambush as soon as it gets dark.*
>
> *Tuesday Morning about 7:30*
> *Really don't know much to say. I don't like to talk about what goes on here an that's about all I know to write about.*

At the same time I was also getting in touch with what was on the inside, what I felt and thought about. Letter writing gave me the opportunity to "reflect out loud" for the first time. I wonder how easy it was for me to share my thoughts with others, or was I wary?

> *Tell me more of yourself - your beliefs pertaining to religion, your philosophy on life, your political leanings, more about your work, your hobbies - anything that interests you or pertains to you.*

I cannot remember being asked what I thought about or felt or believed

prior to my letter writing exchange of this period although I know I felt and thought a lot. It was, and still is, a little awesome to me that people who barely knew me would value what I thought and felt about anything. To value what I thought and felt was to value me but I don't think I understood that at the time.

I'm on a Different Frequency than Most of the Lifers Around Here

My parallel to their military existence was the strict upbringing from which I had just emerged. For the first time in my life it was possible to push back the boundaries. I could not totally control my life but for the first time I felt I had some freedom. I could choose, or not, to go to classes or the library or anywhere near the university. I could choose to write letters or assignments. I felt I had more control than they did. I can remember looking for depth in the letters that had something to do with the risk taken in expressing inner thoughts and feelings, the depth of thought involved in thinking through these thoughts and feelings and the effort and courage it took to write them down.

From my standpoint now, it is impossible to say what I internalized during my letter writing experience. As I read the letters now I see I certainly was presented with images of how people responded to authority and how they felt about living lives of which they were not in control.

> *Next time I leave this country it will be for good and then I'll be able to direct my life through whichever channels I please. There'll be no more green uniform, and no more captains, majors, etc ... it'll be like beginning a new life.*

As I create a composite of the images about their responses to authority and power in this situation, I begin to wonder about how all people, women, children and men, feel when they are in situations where they are not in control.

Particularly, I wonder about the children who have been, are, and will be in a classroom with me and how they might respond to me in my position of power as I direct their use of time and focus of interest. I also wonder about how we are all directed by external expectations of what it means to educate and be educated in our society. Noddings' (1984) description of the paternal desire to control the child in education sounds similar to my perceptions of the military and I am led to another wonder about the interpretation of this desire to control by the controlled.

> *For some strange reason they have been on my back a little more than usual. I wonder if it could be my appearance. I have grown my moustache back, and with my glasses and peace symbol I was already to march in the next moratorium. All the lifers think I am a hippie and I really irritate them which is exactly what I want. It will make it a little harder on me but it gives me great satisfaction and will make getting out of this bloody army just a little more better.*

The letters present many ways for me to gain insights into how I view authority and the people who wield power. As for me, I think of myself as a connected teacher (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986) in relation to children. Some responded meekly.

> *O Boy! Our captain just caught me here writing letters and said I had to clean this room. I already cleaned it but I didn't sweep it.*
>
> *Actually I am supposed to be at work right now and am praying that I don't get caught here writing letters.*

Some responded with images of contempt.

> *The new CO is a real shitbird. He is a lifer from way back*

Some responded somewhere between meekness and contempt by complying on the outside but expressing lack of respect on the inside.

> *Our First Sergeant has devised a new game called "Sandbag the Roof". It is a game which causes many hours of pain and frustration.*

Some responded on the inside to their powerless position by redirecting their thoughts. I am reminded of my own daydreaming excursions over the years during endless hours of sitting in a desk.

> *When the lifers get on my back and piss me off all I have to do is think about you and then everything is alright.*

Some used humor to cope with senseless routines that sought conformity.

> *I start processing out of the army tomorrow. That's when the hassle begins. I can see already that I'm working on a different frequency than the lifers around here. It seems they think I would be a much more outstanding individual if I were to get a haircut. So what's the kid to do. I don't want to go home looking like I was on the wrong side of a pair of barber shears. Besides it's cold where I live and I don't particularly care to walk around with a frozen head.*

Some found themselves enmeshed in an ugly web of torment and guilt in which they, disillusioned with the price of obeying questionable orders, themselves became victims.

> *I hope that when my judgement day rolls around I'll have a lenient judge ... Do you know what our orders were. Shoot anyone that runs from us. My squad killed 17 in one afternoon. Seventeen people; 17 human beings.*

The word *lifer* is a word that was used frequently in the letters. My

impression is that it meant more than a career military person. It also meant someone who wielded power, who was responsible for filling hours with useless tasks such as sandbagging, or getting ready for an inspection, someone who was not respected and someone who *had an acute shortage of brains*. I have met many *lifers* in schools; administrators and teachers who ran their schools and classrooms like military institutions. I know I have never wanted to be a lifer as a teacher but I do wonder about how children have responded to my position and there probably have been times when I shouted orders the way a sergeant would command his squad. These would have been at-the-end-of-my-tether times, desperate times.

Most of the time I have been able to "give in" to children, my own and others, when they wanted to do something that caused no harm to themselves or anyone else. During these times I have become conscious of a gaze that informed me I was contradicting "the paternal project of curriculum" which is "to claim the child, to teach him or her to master the language, the rules, the games and the name of the father" (Noddings, 1984, p.182).

However, when I have let go of a desire to enforce what I might think appropriate in favour of trusting children's insights and decisions, I have not been disappointed. Indeed, the more I hand over responsibility, the more responsible and capable children become. I don't have to control with an iron fist or a sense of knowing better in order to "get children to do the right thing".

What many view as "naughty" is not naughty to me. I again cannot say whether this goes back to my own recollections of being punished for actions in childhood which I considered harmless, or if I have internalized an informative appreciation for the times I have been understood, or if my friends through their

letters allowed me insight and understanding which shaped how I came to know. I sense that what I feel and think has become part of my physical being, through living in my own stories while always in the stories of others.

Some learned to manipulate those in positions of power.

> *I'll have to submit my name for my second R&R soon and start twisting my sergeant's arm so I can get one.*

Others had difficulty manipulating decisions which affected their lives and expressed frustration.

> *MACV in Saigon passed a new rule that only one R&R is allowed per tour. Some units can get away with it and send their men on two but since I work right here in the R&R center and have a chicken shit captain who is afraid of a colonel 8 miles away, it looks as if I am going to have to pull a miracle out of my bag.*

Respect was earned by officers who were one of the men, who were young like them or at least thought young, who were in touch and questioned themselves, others and their actions and who could also make decisions. Those who acted and felt young might have been those officers who didn't subject their men to the rules of the father.

> *The major really is a nice guy. Doesn't act old like the other officers. I guess he's kind of like me, acts and feels much younger than he is. I wonder if that's a psychological hang-up.*

Some experienced empathy when their rank and position changed and they had experienced what it was like to be on the receiving end.

> *I have to call the activities to the troops. I used to hate to receive the daily plans when I was out in the field because you never knew where the "lifers" were going to send you or what you might find.*

All of these responses to authority have informed me as to how best I can be with children. I do not wish to be a *lifer* or a *chicken shit captain*. If I am to earn honesty and respect like the major who *doesn't think old like the other officers* then I must learn to live in relation with my children. In so doing, I am "not content to enforce rules - and may even refuse occasionally to do so" continually referring "the rules to their ground in caring" (Noddings, 1984, p.178). I relinquish my duty as charge person in favour of being of equal rank. Trust grows and with it, an atmosphere of mutual respect. I don't see the threat of pending mutiny. Instead, I see the children and I am not afraid to seek their help when I don't understand some aspect of the classroom procedure.

I have learned that children respond to teachers with a term that describes either their acceptance or rejection of their manner of being in the classroom: in the vocabulary of children, teachers are either "mean" or "nice". I don't wish to be viewed as a mean teacher because a mean teacher doesn't understand, seeks control, misinterprets behavior and causes *pain and frustration*. If I am a mean teacher, then I am a *lifer*. If, on the other hand I wish to make the nice teacher list, then I have to allow a relationship to exist. I am not afraid to reach out with a smile, be myself, strive for understanding, respect myself and others, invite all to share in the responsibility of learning together and feel comfortable with myself and my surroundings. I must not be afraid to *think young* ... and I must be mindful not *to act old like the other officers*.

I already miss your warm smile and good humor.

Presently Just about Everyone is Drunk

> *I am moody as hell; I'm selfish and very self centered at times. I have always had a playboy attitude and treated girls as toys. When I met you though, I saw myself as I really was and wasn't. You made me feel rotten inside as you are so young and innocent and as you said, religious. I can't stand religion as it is based solely on money nowadays (CHRISTIANITY IN PARTICULAR) and leans towards the status quo. But I've needed something to believe in and to lean on, so I turned to marijuana and ACID when I was 16. My parents adopted me when I was a kid and my real parents were another story. Yes I have people waiting to see me as I think they love me very much but I do not love them in the true sense of the meaning of love. I don't believe I've ever really had any love in me - only selfish interests whether sexual or to better my own position in society.*
>
> *To put it all in a nutshell I am a mixed up guy. Vietnam has straightened out most of my juvenile tendencies but now one question remains to be solved. Should I commit myself ... or should I go on playing this pseudo game of the hardened punk cheating myself and believing all the lies I tell myself.*

Alcohol and drugs seemed to be a large part of the scene in Vietnam. The use of drugs accompanied the hippie counter culture which arose in response to exposure of the father's growing contradictions, one of them being to ask the troops "to fight on in Vietnam in the name of democracy while at home their brethren were shot down for asking, why?" (Maclear, 1981, p.384). Smoking marijuana became a cool "in"thing to do almost in defiance of the fork tongued father.

> *Tonite I got stoned for the first time since getting back from Sydney. I had almost forgotten how nice grass is in my 10 day abstinence from it. We listened to my Jeff St. John tape and everyone says it is really "heavy". Remember I explained what "heavy" music is to you.*

In other cases it became a way of life perhaps to help a person cope with what he

had experienced and seen.

> *You have to understand. A year over here and a guy kinda loses his mind.*

The use of drugs doesn't feature as much as the use of alcohol in my letters. Certainly everyone did not appear to be affected by its use but clearly there are messages for me.

> *You said to be sincere so I will. First of all I am me and to know me you must understand. All of my friends are "HEADS." To one who is hep, this means he is turned on, aware, or to you, a person who is a bohemian type, smokes or has smoked marijuana, taken LSD, and if you get to know him, a very beautiful person in his mind and soul. I am being sincere as I do not consider myself God's gift to the young. I am wrapped up in my beliefs, my friends and their beliefs, and most of all, making the world a place in the sun where people can be of one universal society where they have no war, greed, religious desires, or petty differences such as racial discrimination and nationalities. It's hard for you to understand all this I know ... I want to live life as it should be ... I plan to go back home soon and groove with all the friends I have met and travel around for a period of at least six years. If I feel a desire to attain a degree through College, then I will. But wherever I end up I'll have achieved my goal to see the world as it is and not what the travel folders suggest. After this I'll settle down and get married, have children and lead a life of my own with my wife. I'll bring my children up to love life and appreciate what we have and can learn. There you have it and I hope you are not shocked ... I've got to see all around, up and down and round and round before I decide. I am searching for my inner self ...*

When I reflect on the references to drug and alcohol use in my letters, I am faced with an image of what it must have been like to be there.

> *I'm truly feeling better after my little spell with the flu. Found out I had a virus in my throat and consequently there was nothing the doctor could do for it. Antibiotics would not even help, so I just had to sweat it out. Tomorrow I go back to the doctor for a checkup, so I do think I'm out of the woods for*

right now. It's really been miserable, but sickness is all part of the tour in Vietnam. And believe me I've had my share!

The image is of being in a dirty, sleazy, stinky, hot, humid bar where any amount of debauchery and immorality could be bought for a cheap price. The image of the bar in Star Wars comes to mind. Alcohol was used for celebration and reward.

Presently just about everyone is drunk. After leaving Cambodia we were given four days leisure and rest. Tonite being the last night everything is up for grabs. Tomorrow is another day and back to the field I go.

It was the grand prize for a basketball game.

We started a basketball team from our company about two weeks ago. There isn't anyone who can beat us. We've won 16 straight games. We won six cases of beer last night when we won so I had no choice but to booze it up ... Next week I'll be able to drive around in my car and really do some drinking.

It was often a self induced reward or perhaps a legal, socially accepted way to feel good, or perhaps forget, or maybe even overcome the boredom.

That's the way this army works; if you do a half-way good job they turn around and case you as much as they can. As you can tell I'm quite "Full" but you can't blame a guy for having a few beers.

Sometimes they had to pay for someone else's use.

The poker game just broke up so I guess I'll get to go to sleep soon. Oh no! Just as I expected, the major is drunk. Now he'll probably want to sit up and talk. UGH! ... Well I waited for a while and I guess he crashed. I'm going to do the same.

My impression is that for the most part alcohol was used to escape from a

situation where a person felt frustrated at not being in control of his own life and living a life for which it was difficult to claim ownership.

> *I hate being isolated from "Life" and not being able to be myself. And that's what it's like living in Vietnam. In so many ways a person can become stagnant in life's ways, but ironic as it is, it can also spur him on to greater things in the future.*

My letters inform me that substance abuse has something to do with lack of control of one's own life and lack of self esteem and a desire to free the spirit. A neighbor who went to Vietnam described his workday and provided insight through description of his experiences with people who drank for whatever reason.

> *9:00 AM - Right now I'm on the bus run. I am writing this letter every time I stop at the rest center at Vung Tau. I stop here for about 15 minutes every hour. The R and C was built in 1969 for the Australian army when they get leave which is two leave days per month. The R and C is like a big Hotel/Motel kind of thing. It has 92 rooms and a 52 foot bar. I sometimes come down here when I'm on a rest day as I can go up to the flat top roof and sunbake with a nice cold beer and there is always a cool wind blowing up on the roof as it is three stories high. It is just great down here when you are on leave.*
>
> *9:45 AM - I have just run three drunks from our camp to the R and C. When one of them was getting out of the bus he fell into a pool of water. I stopped the bus well away from the water but he was too drunk to even see it. How they get drunk at this time of the morning I will never know. If they're this drunk at this time of the day, thank god I'm not driving the late leave bus tonight.*
>
> *10:45 - Back again after another run. This time there must have been something wrong as I had 35 on the bus and none of them had even had a drink. I think they are the ones who were down at the beach all morning. I wish they would all go to the beach. Well ... now I'm going in for my dinner.*
>
> *1:45 - Back again. I had four on the bus and they*

started to fight half way back to here so I had to stop the bus and break them up as one of them ripped a seat off the bus.

2:45 PM - Had the best run of all. I picked up no-one but I ran over a snake on the way to camp.

3:55 PM - Good but on the way back I got a flat tyre going to camp. Took me 10 minutes to change it.

4:45 PM - Had 55 on the bus coming back but they were quiet. Some had been drinking but as I said they were not too bad.

How can I as a teacher empower children to take control of their lives, to value their lives and their contributions to our world? How can I help them to feel good about themselves and in themselves without substances? It is my feeling that living "clean" or "dry" can become a reality if I can help children achieve this appreciation for self. Without this self appreciation I am not sure that the drug awareness programs will deter potential users from succumbing to peer pressure and experimenting with drugs.

If you will come to the US and give me and my friends a chance, you will never again regret it. I consider you to be a little open minded and promise you that you and I could really have the best time a person could dream of. You see ... I love you for what you are now and could be later ... for what you say and the way you say it ... because you are real and feel real things. You are not a wind up toy who thinks what she's told and does what others before have done. Please ... accept my bid and do what your inner soul and mind crave for. Don't be left behind hung up on a lily pad of loneliness and boredom ... ask your mother for advice.

I witnessed drug use during my own high school years when two girls in grade nine put something in their coca cola drinks. I can't remember what the substance was but Mel tells me it could have been aspirin. I remember seeing the girls staggering and quite out of control of themselves. Their punishment was, of course, expulsion.

Not much else new except my sister was busted at school for possession and was put in Juvenile Hall, suspended from school, and is on probation. My old roommate is joining the navy in July and a lot of my old friends are either in the Army or Marine Corps. Glad I only have eight more months left till I am a civilian again and can do what I want, go where I want, and say what I please.

In grade eleven drinking alcohol was discouraged in a way that I have never again encountered in anyone else's story. One July afternoon, we gathered in the hall where assemblies were held for an important presentation. At the end of a mind conditioning session we were encouraged to make a pledge not to drink alcohol until we were twenty one. Such abstinence would release a soul from purgatory. Purgatory was the halfway house where impure, but not wicked, souls suffered until cleansed when they could pass on to heaven. Those of us still living could hurry the process along for these wretched but not lost souls by praying for them, doing penance for them and as indicated, abstaining from alcohol until the age of twenty one.

Unfortunately I had my first bacardi and coke when I was twenty. Unless someone else pledged and lasted the duration, that poor soul is still in purgatory. I felt that it was unfortunate but I also began to think the whole thing was a little silly.

In retrospect, though, discouraging the intake of alcohol until adulthood was commendable. In those days alcohol was not considered a drug and its effects on health were not known as they are today. The main purpose for young girls abstaining was to avoid being in a position in which we could lose our power to say "no" to men's sexual advances. It's an interesting wonder that my schooling acted like a drug to keep me subdued. It took away my freedom and

cradled me in blissful conformity. It's also interesting that my Vietnam experience provided me with a way to reflect on who I was and my place in the world. I no longer wore my uniform and for the first time, could make choices, unlike the people to whom I wrote who probably for the first time wore a uniform and had narrow choices.

> *It sure is a bumber being back over here, I cant wate to get home, 40 more days! The 2nd and 3rd nights we were back we all went to where Marco and Milt stay and got High, that was realy together to.*

It's Just The Way I Feel: I Shouldn't Even Be Writing These Things

Why is "the way I feel" considered of secondary importance in our culture? It seems that during the last twenty five years there has been a shift in thinking, but the recognition of, and expression of feelings are still somewhat regarded as soft practices. Erica and Leif attend a school where the counsellor works with whole classes on the importance of acknowledging and expressing feelings. I believe she is making a difference in a way which directly affects the quality of the work the children produce as learners. The following is an excerpt of a letter I wrote to the Deputy Superintendent of our School District out of a concern that her position may be cut due to budget constraints:

> I am moved to express my applause for Ms. Nancy McLeod because I truly believe that she is making a difference in a way which serves to enhance who the children are, how they think about themselves and those around them, and the quality of the work they produce as learners. She also demonstrates how we all teach and learn from our own and others' experiences. I am of the opinion that people like Nancy and the work they do could help provide the answer to the awesome question of how to help our children develop a love of learning. The teachers are doing a wonderful job. It is my observation that Nancy helps the teachers to reach

more of the children in their care.

> When we learn to care for self and others and when the importance of this is acknowledged in a community, many barriers are removed. I see many barriers being removed at my children's school. As a supply teacher, I can honestly say that it is a genuine pleasure to go into any classroom there. As a parent, I am grateful that my children are aware that they are valued and cared for, not just in our home, but also in their school community and that they are also aware of who they are as caregivers both at home and at school. (March 19, 1993).

My letters are all about feelings and thoughts about feelings. Feelings were so strong in the letters that even though sometimes I sensed an attempt to inhibit them because of the training of their authors, they came through anyway. Their feelings sought a medium. I know from my own childhood memories that feelings are important to children. Nobody took the time to explain to me when I was a three year old, or ever, why my father was suddenly no longer a part of my life other than to say "He doesn't want us anymore." I remember that my Grandmother's philosophy was that kids are resilient, they don't feel things like adults, that they wouldn't understand anyway and would bounce back. Because no-one thought it was important enough to explain to me or to listen to a child's attempts at understanding I cried alone ... a lot. Nobody understood my child's depth of feelings and the great internal mental processing I went through in order to try and figure things out by myself. I didn't have a medium for the expression of my feelings and thoughts. Writing was only for compositions about imaginary topics, far removed from the reality of my world.

As an adult, wrongly or rightly I wear my heart on my sleeve. When people inquire into my state of being, I tell them how I am feeling even if perhaps they aren't desiring a response other than "Fine thanks, and you?" cueing them for something like "Oh just fine." It's important to me that those around me

understand what is going on inside me so that should I appear distant or miserable, they know it has nothing personally to do with them. It's strange to me that people would go through the ritual of inquiring about a person's feelings without really wanting to know. It becomes an act of going through the motions or niceties without genuine caring on the inside and true concern for the real me who is *deep down inside beneath my shell.* It seems to indicate that our society is not a deep, caring one, that the outside visibleness of my shell and my visible situation is valued over who I am as Dillard also indicated "beneath my skin, behind my ribs, within my skull" (1987, p 32).

> *I think that you may have thought that I was crazy when we went to Mass, but my mind was filled with all sorts of emotions. I felt sad, bad, good, lonely and yet I felt I was with dear close friends.*

As a woman I use writing and conversation to make sense or to celebrate joy and sorrow. I now have these two mediums as well as the personal letter to process the never-ending incoming from the paddies. Laura Palmer (1987) in her book, Shrapnel in the Heart, noted that there was an absence of letters left at the Remembrance Wall from fathers who had lost their sons in Vietnam. She concluded that it was harder for men to express their feelings in letters. Perhaps it's not considered manly. Yet I read the letters from my friends as they struggled to understand and process their feelings and I am left with a feeling that this way of thinking has caused a lot of hardship for those of us who received the message in childhood that feelings were not important: messages from catch phrases that I've often heard, such as "Boys don't cry", "Turn off the crocodile tears," "Grow up," "You're too soft, you'll have to learn to toughen up," "That doesn't hurt. You'll be alright. Now go and play."

Many times I wish I have a simple life but it seems like I will never have one. Maybe I make it complicated myself. In life you might meet the many sufferings of life before you can better understand and know yourself ... the many variable intensities and the characteristics of your own personality and your life.

Expressing my feelings puts me more in touch with what I believe instead of what I think others expect me to feel, think and believe. Expressing my feelings is a celebration of the uniqueness of my life. My feelings are important to me. As a mother and teacher, I consider my children's feelings also to be important. It troubles me to see adults say to a crying child that "it's alright" when clearly to the child whose visible tears run like flowing waters, it is not alright at all.

The More I Think About It the Sadder I Feel

I've watched so many people die over here and the more I think about it the sadder I get ... please don't think that I'm looking for a shoulder to cry on. It's just the way I feel right now. I shouldn't even be writing this.

With the author's use of the words "thinking" and "feeling", I am led to wonder about the connection between the two. The act of thinking is traditionally associated with an analytical, rational procedure. Feeling something, on the other hand is traditionally associated with being in an irrational state. Yet, my letters indicate that the process of thinking about feelings can lead to confusion. I wonder why I should feel the need to process feelings through thought and either verify them or negate them.

I think I wrote you before but I found your address again. So I'm writing again ... I'm just trying to

figure out if I need a reason. I saw your address and thought of you and wanted to tell you if you know anyone travelling in this country that would appreciate any travel help in the desert or any hints and suggestions from this part of the scenic mountainous west or if you had any plans to travel at all or what are you doing or this sentence goes on forever. It is always good to have addresses of people who will take care of you when you are travelling.

I wonder if it's because feelings are not recognized as sufficient unto themselves, but require legitimation through rational explanation in our culture. It's interesting that rational thought does not have to be supported by feelings. It is assumed to be correct and superior to feelings. We are prone to making sense of our feelings but confusion arises when thoughts and feelings become enmeshed and I wonder again if this problem could be avoided by helping our children to value their feelings, to tune in to them and value them as a component of knowing.

I have so many thoughts and feelings piled up I just don't know how to express myself. Somehow I don't feel like we are "stemming the tide of communism" as they tell us we are doing. I don't guess I'd better start on my feelings about this war or else I might not ever finish this letter. Suffice it to say that I am against it, OK?

One of my saddest moments was visiting my paternal grandparents who lived in a city about one thousand kilometers from where I grew up. This was one of the rare occasions when we saw them. I was about ten years old and I was given some Christmas cards to look through. From the time my father left our lives until nineteen years later, there was no contact with him. When other children asked what my father did, I told them I didn't have a father. This made me different to everybody else. Throughout my elementary years a recurring dream haunted my nights. In this dream I searched the school playground

desperately for the shoes and socks that weren't on my feet. I became embarrassed and ashamed as the search became more frantic. My loss was real.

> *I want you to write and tell me all about yourself your life history. Myself I don't think I have a history background ... It's started raining again this dam mud is getting me down.*

From among the brightly colored, pleasing Christmas cards, emerged one that made me sadder than I ever imagined I could feel. It was from Bob, Cathy and children. The father I never had was somebody else's father.

> *Life is funny and you must always be ready for the unexpected.*

It is difficult to be ready for the unexpected and even if I am ready I may not think about what is important to me. I can brace myself for the unexpected by being tuned in to myself and conscious of the possible consequences of the decisions I make. The passing of a life is often unexpected. The letter from Larry, my *friend forever* who died, is notable because it demands that I think about what is important. Death makes me mindful of the significance of life. The passing of a life is a sad event. But the passing of life serves to remind us, who are left in this world, of our priorities. An elementary school administrator recently told me that the death of his father served as a catalyst to return him to the classroom where he felt more valuable as a person. He felt alienated from people as an administrator, unable to come to terms with what I might now term a "them" and "me" tension.

Our community has recently been touched by a little girl who has leukemia. Without a bone marrow transplant she will die. The search has begun for a compatible donor. How would I live my life if I daily faced the conscious

imminence of near death? What would become important? Who would become important? What makes life worth while? How important is time?

Time Goes by Mighty Fast Over Here

Time seems to accelerate with the passing of the years. I remember when it used to drag. Time particularly dragged for me as a child. I couldn't wait for the school holidays and enjoyed the last week wind-down when we would take the desks outside to wash them and then scrub the floors, walls, cupboards and boards in preparation for the next school year. It was a rewarding task signalling the end of one phase and preparation for another.

> *It's raining quite hard right now. We're expecting a typhoon with heavy winds and rain, so at least the heat has vanished for a while. Even with a raincoat I still get soaked, and my happy thought to offset those bad moments, is that I'll be leaving for the homeland in 7 short days ... My remaining days here seem like an eternity but one of these days I know I'll be flying up up and away.*

Nothing much happened during the holidays. School finished around December 12, Christmas came and went and January occupied the rest of the summer break until school resumed:

> *Do believe Christmas has come and gone. You probably care because you are with your family and loved ones but over here it ain't nothing but another working day with a turkey and all the goodies. It really beats the hell out of cold C rations though.*

January was long, hot and often uneventful except for the time I spent playing the piano, fantasizing that I was a great concert pianist. Hours passed as I sat at the piano so absorbed that I became unaware of time passing and it ceased to exist. Time also ceases for me when I write. It must have something to do with the

intensity of the focus and the engagement in creating.

I have observed the same intensity of concentration in Erica. One morning when she was four years old, we sat in the car waiting for Jessica to come out of the house so that we could give her a lift to school. Erica was thoroughly engrossed in the book she was reading. I drove Jessica to school, kissed her goodbye, drove back and parked in our driveway. I noticed Erica was still reading her book. I turned off the motor and waited. After a while she said "Mum, Jess had better hurry up or she's going to be late for school." When I told her we had already dropped Jessica off, she couldn't believe it. Time had stopped for her; outside events ceased to exist. Having experienced that state myself when playing the piano and writing, I knew the intensity of her experience. When I retold this story to someone who had obviously never experienced such depth of concentration, there was a concern expressed that perhaps Erica had some sort of brain disorder. I knew this was not the case. I couldn't help but wonder about how immensely rewarding learning would be if we could all experience it with such intensity.

Such suspension of time is different to the experience of working hard to pass the time.

> *I am thankful that I am working so hard though because it makes the time go much faster. I am still counting the days and hoping my luck holds out.*

And it is different to keeping busy to pass the time.

> *... going to have to keep quite busy in hopes that time will pass quickly. Otherwise each day will drag by slowly.*

Hard work and keeping busy are not the same as losing myself in time

which is almost a meditative state, existing without purpose, merely being.

Free time is worthwhile only when I'm in control and can choose what to do with that time.

> *... better if I plan my return trip when you are out of school and have some free time.*

January was otherwise spent on the front verandah playing handball with my sister Kris, while Mum and Grandma watched the Wimbledon tennis match on TV. Weekends were similarly spent while they watched the coverage of the Canterbury/Bankstown's football match against another team in the league.

> *The football game of the week is on the radio right now. The Minnesota Vikings (my team) and the Detroit Lions are battling for the divisions title. I've got money bet on the Vikings so they'd better get rolling. Right now they're losing.*

Kris and I recently discussed the fact that neither of us are drawn to sports leagues and their coverage on TV. It seemed to us that Mum and Granny lived through their sports heroes. When the heroes won, they won. My sister and I are not heroes but we know that we are living our own lives and that doesn't necessarily mean being on the winning team, or even a fan of the winning team.

> *I've never counted the days for anything else like I have in this damn army*

Everybody counted down the days; days in the service as well as days in Vietnam. When they got down to one hundred days they became short and counted the days of their lives off on a Snoopy Calendar.

> *Happiness really is being short.*

Yet time can sometimes play tricks and time ends life.

> *In 209 days I'll rotate out of the Nam. That puts my rotation date about the 7th of September. That may seem like an awful long time but time goes by mighty fast over here.*

Time and life lasted for only six more days for Larry.

Ironically time dragged for most other people unless they were busy:

> *It's been an awfully long year.*
>
> *Time is sure passing slow.*
>
> *Well it's the start of another month and it sure is good to see them go by. I came into the Army with about 730 days and now I'm down around 90. I've never counted the days for anything else like I have in this damn Army. I couldn't wait to leave VN and now I can't wait to leave Georgia.*

However, time is life and there is an enormous responsibility not to waste the time of others with whom we share our time.

> *Tonite they showed "MASH" in the mess hall. It was a typical Army performance. First the projector would break, or the lite would burn out. And then the film would snap. All in all it was a miserable showing, but as I said "typical" Army. Fortunately, I could foresee what was going to happen and left after about fifteen minutes. When the final tally came down, it took 4 hours and 25 minutes to show a 2 hour movie. Yea "Green Team"!!*

Remember that On a Clear Day You Truly Can See Forever

My future is uncertain. Soon my thesis will be completed. I will add letters to my name: Janette Catherine Knutson, B Ed, M Ed and I don't know what will happen after that.

> *I plan to work towards a second undergraduate degree*

before continuing in graduate work. I hope to be able to enter medical school in a couple of years.

The future depends on hopes, plans and dreams. Plans are perhaps more readily realized. Hopes have possibility. A dream, it appears, can envision a fantasy but has no definite connection to reality.

I hope to go to Acapulco for a vacation; but this is in my dream plans.

Currently I have no plan other than completing my thesis in the next three months. I hope to start my Ph D in the fall and I dream of being granted a scholarship to assist me in realizing my hope.

My first letter to you and I wonder how many letters will be written ... December or January I will start work on my master's Degree in either Education or Business Administration. I may do both - have been boning up for my entrance exam and having been out of school for over two years really makes it tough. Just proves that education never ends. Through the GI Bill, if I carry a full load I will receive $130 a month. How about that!

The outcome of my hopes, plans and dreams are revealed in time but time doesn't "tell;" events in the composition of my life (Bateson, 1991) lead to the ultimate destination.

I would like to comment on something you said. You said that a person shouldn't waste their whole life trying to amass money. I was glad to hear that you felt that way about that particular subject. I am a strong believer that a person should above all get a job that he enjoys or a job that he finds rewarding. My psychology of life is that money is only as good as the enjoyment and pleasure that it can bring to a man and his family. I personally hope to be able to provide a good living for my wife and family and still have plenty of time to be with them. I feel that too many men today are spending most of their time at their job and therefore are not devoting enough time to their families. I would like to hear how you

feel about this. I am sure that from what you said you are on the right track. I would have liked very much to have had the time to have talked to you about this subject in detail.

A clock tells the time and keeps me conscious of its passing. At the end of our grade one year together, Angela who taught me about the butterflies and the flowers, gave me a beautiful, small, gold, travel alarm clock which I carry with me still. It doesn't matter to me whether it works or not. But it still does. It is a reminder to which my children are also drawn, a reminder about the fact that butterflies and flowers have conversations and that I missed one of them. Will I realize my dreams?

Only time will tell the answer to that question.

Perhaps some things are better kept in the realm of dreamworld and never brought to reality. I'm not sure that I can see forever on a clear day. I can hope for peace and happiness but there are no guarantees that the events I hope and plan for will be realized. If they are not, then hopes and plans become old dreams. All I really have is now, today in which I live, hope, plan and dream, but mostly live.

The present is all I can give my children and the children with whom I am engaged in a teaching/learning relationship conscious that we are all "of yesterday and tomorrow" (Neitsche, 1966, p. 260). I am responsible for allowing opportunities for them to engage in learning that is meaningful, a learning state that causes them to lose track of what's going on around them, that totally involves them ... an opportunity for time to stand still ... Angela's little, gold travel alarm clock reminds me of what is possible when that happens.

Chapter 6

My Story of Becoming a Teacher

Being a teacher was not something I think I ever considered as a child. My impression of being a teacher way back then meant becoming someone I was not, or at least someone I did not want to be. My elementary school learning experiences were shrouded in fear.

A Child's Prayer

Towards the middle of grade four I began praying for the end of the world hoping to prevent the pending torture of surviving two years in the Principal's combined grades five and six class. Once a week she visited our class for nail and hair inspection. We placed our hands on our desks and sat very quietly and still while she walked up and down every aisle scrutinizing hands, fingernails and hair for cleanliness. Anyone not up to regulation standard was whacked over the head with a club fashioned from rolled up newspaper.

> *When we feel inadequate we may take our feelings out on someone or something else instead of facing them and trying to solve our problems.*

I wasn't ever clubbed but I held my breath as she passed me by and only began breathing again when she left the room. The end of the world, such a complete end, seemed so drastic but I remember thinking that it was the only way to avoid being in her class. We were taught that the end of the world was going to come anyway and at any time so I began to imagine what it would be like.

I imagined that if the sun fell to the earth it would be an instantaneous explosion. All of us would be hit at the same time: my Mother at work, my

Grandmother at Belmore shopping center or bowls, people in other countries, my sister and me in the same school building. My only concern was around the possibility of it hurting and I hoped it wouldn't. The tricky part of the story would happen after that, when God would decide who was going to spend eternity with him. I had to hope that I would be one of those people. However, I wasn't perfect. I had after all sinned and on more than one occasion had confessed to the priest that I had chewed the inside of my cheek. These purges of the soul began after being told in a religion class that it was a sin to do bodily harm to oneself. Our bodies were, after all, temples where God lived. It was one of those miracles, where the aside wonder was fathoming out how he could be in so many temples at the same time. Nevertheless I had chewed the insides of my cheeks, a nervous habit, and made my temple unholy.

Obviously the world did not end, but in one of those round about ways, my prayers were answered: the Principal became ill and was forced to enter a care home. The fact that she was being replaced made it easier to start the year.

> *I'm back on jump status meaning I have to make three jumps a month; and that to some people is not too much fun. I really don't mind I get $55 a month extra. Oh well at least people aren't shooting at me.*

The new Principal, my grade five and six teacher, wore thick glasses, probably almost as thick as mine are now. She had a sadistic tendency of describing the process of having a needle injected through the middle of her eye. I must have misunderstood because I can't comprehend how that would be possible. It was, however, the gruesome image that my child mind imagined, whether correct or not.

She was an actor in the classroom with very little understanding of

children.

This picture is a view of a Cambodian Montegnard village. It was right near our fire base, so I got a chance to go down there and take a few shots. Do you remember the silver bracelet I wear? Well, that's the place where I got it. The people were very friendly although as you can see, they were little more than aborigines. It was sometimes a bit difficult to communicate with them, but with patience and a little sign language, we managed.

One lunch time I literally ran into Carol Long in the playground. Our heads collided and then I fell backwards and crashed the back of my head on the tarred surface of our play area.

It was a hot day and that afternoon during what seemed like an endless stream of exercises on phrases out of our grammar books, I began to feel tired and sick and couldn't control the urge to let my head sink down on the single, wooden desk in search of some kind of comfort: "Who do you think you are, putting your head on your desk like that? Put your head up and work like everybody else!"

I was too sick to even feel the sting of embarrassment that such remarks might have aroused at any other time. I put my head up, loosely clutched at my pencil, cast my swirling eyes over my page searching for a place to begin and vomited all over the floor. Saw-dust was hurriedly scattered over the mess and two girls were assigned to walk me home

Internalizing the Boundaries

Piano lessons were offered at the schools I attended for an extra fee. There were two lessons a week: one lesson was scheduled at lunchtime and the other during school. I began lessons in grade one when I was five years old. I liked piano and did well but I shook before every lesson. I felt a kinship, a connection

with my high school piano teacher.

> *You truly are a beautiful person in the fullest sense of the word.*

I felt scared of my elementary piano teacher. She did not tolerate mistakes. I was thumped on the back more than once, my fingers felt the pain of her pointer several times, and her sharp tongue was the weapon with which she formed the words of her thought.

> *Sometimes I get scared inside ... I feel so guilty everyday it makes me nervous.*

I don't know how but I do know why I stuck it out. Choice was something of which I was unaware. The question of options didn't occur to me. This was it. This is what a child had to go through in order to become a fine pianist. Music ran in our family. They must have all endured this to become such musical people, I thought. I never complained.

> *Well Well Well how are you this lousy day. I know I still haven't gotten over the shock of coming back to this wasteland. I can't really imagine that I ever left. Bob's got 30 days left and he goes home. Me, I got about a million ... Their trying to put me in the field again, that's just a waste of time. Are you still working all the time, I don't believe your ever gonna quit. As for me I don't think I'll ever work again, all I'm gonna do is Party.*

I wonder what indefinable chords are struck to move an otherwise compliant child to feel with her body that enough is enough. During one of my lessons in grade six, my piano teacher began one of her rages. I felt an aura come over me, my ears began to ring and I could no longer hear what she was saying. Something was happening and I was in a state of no return. I did not plan my

course of action. It just happened. I stood up from the piano bench and floated to the doorway where I stood motionless as if somehow suspended in space.

> Then he took a peculiar half step, moving from shade into bright sunlight, and the booby trapped 105 round blew him into a tree (p.90) ... he must have thought it was the sunlight that was killing him. It was not the sunlight. It was a rigged 105 round (O'Brien, 1991, p.91).

I became conscious of her bellowing at me to get back there and sit down. I looked down the six steps and towards the iron gate at the end of the path which led to my freedom. I took in the six-foot wooden fence on the left hand side that separated this torture chamber from the schoolyard and then I noticed her voice becoming softer until she said my name and asked me to come back and sit down. I felt safer with this gentler approach and I did. That was towards the end of our time of six years together. It's too bad I couldn't have had my out of body experience sooner because after it, our relationship bred warmth and comfort.

> *You don't know what anxiety and anticipation is until you go to the post office every night looking for that envelope postmarked with Australia on it. Every time a flight comes back from Sydney I look for the friend of mine with some news. Today I got what I've been waiting for.*

<u>My Kind Teacher Story</u>

> *I have never felt like this before and I hope you believe me when I say I am truly sincere ... I feel as if I've known you a long time. Somehow you and everything you are to me help me retain my sanity in everyday life.*

I felt loved by my grade one teacher who was a novice training to be a nun.

She wore a small black veil but her hair still showed. She was kind and spoke with a soft voice.

> *Words are really too awkward to express the symphonic tranquility of feeding the birds with you or to express the radiant beauty you exude.*

She had clear, bright eyes that looked into mine when we spoke and it let me know that what I had to say was important to her which meant that *I* was important to her.

> *Eyes like yours should be set among the stars so the whole world could get hung up on them.*

My eyes reflect my inner self, that is, my mood and my health. My eyes lose their color and brightness when I'm not well. They changed when I was pregnant and nursing; they had more detail and texture. The whites of my eyes also inform me of my health, or reflect what is going on inside me and my state of fitness and wellbeing. After exercise they are bright and sharp, if I am tired they can look sluggish and slow. My children's eyes tell me if they are about to come down with an illness, if they are sad, excited or anxious. Eyes are telling. It's important for me as one who lives in relation to be informed by another's eyes, to be sensitive to what a person's eyes tell me about how the events of life are being processed inside that body. Leif is fortunate to have a teacher who has kind, soft eyes that receive him when he speaks to her. Her eyes are the mirror of her caring, a mirror into which Leif and the other children in her class can look and see themselves reflected back as valued people.

> *I don't believe I could ever forget your eyes.*

One day my beloved grade one teacher left the room. We all had to stand

and face the front while she was out. I was put in charge. My job was to tell her who talked or fooled around.

> *I've got my own section now so things have changed for me. That means I'm the boss over my gun and six people. I'm not very happy though. Usually people who get a section are happy but I'm not.*

I was relieved that everyone stood at attention as expected but I had to tell Paul Burridge to stop picking his nose. I liked the idea of being the boss but I didn't like being charged with the responsibility of having to tell on someone and get them into trouble.

Daydreams and Imagining My Future

I did not want to be a teacher. Growing up in a world without choices, I used to daydream about starting an orphanage for children who had no one to care for them. I imagined how I would take them in and look after them and create a place where they all felt happy and safe. I saw them smiling.

> *We unconsciously pick up attitudes and opinions which we see in those around us, even before we are old enough to understand their significance ... We form our opinions about people and things through our experience with them. If our experience is limited then we may add our own preconceived ideas to complete the picture. A bad experience may tend to leave a prejudice against something, while a good experience may leave a person feeling right ... to overcome prejudice is to learn to accept yourself and become sure of your own opinions and abilities.*
>
> *Am I prejudice? Yes, I am prejudiced against some ideas, but I am not prejudiced against the White-people. The Indians have good friends among the White-people as well as the bad friends (or enemies).*
>
> *One time my buddies said I was no good and that the only good Indian was a dead Indian. I told them that I learned all the bad things from the White people. When they tease me it doesn't bother me*

because I am proud of being an Indian. I have nothing against the American White-people "except" that they took our land away from us. We were fighting for our land when they called us savages. We were defeated, but our "spirits" were not broken, so today we are still fighting, not with weapons of arrows or rifles, but with the "words" of the White-people's laws. My people have their own lawyers now. We still have a lot of legal problems to settle for our forth-coming generations. It's hard to defeat a proud Indian, remember that. Someone might beat me up for something but I'll never give-in.

My daydream, at some point shifted to a home for stray dogs where they would all be looked after, well fed and safe. Then it became my own order of nuns.

Towards the end of grade twelve I knew what I wanted to do with my life. I wanted to help people. I wanted to enter the Little Sisters of the Poor and work in inner city areas, bringing food and comfort to those who didn't have choices. I made arrangements with the local priest who I knew really well because I went to 6:00 AM Mass every weekday as well as weekend services. He was delighted and supportive. The time would never be right but it had to be done; I had to tell my mother of my future plans. She was not pleased. She said that decisions like that could be made when I was 21 and stormed up the street and around the corner to the church where she abused the priest for encouraging me in such an asinine pursuit.

The Marine Corps fouls up everything I plan on.

Who knows where the paths we might have trod, but didn't, would have taken us? My life has been full of possibilities, yet I am where I am today not only because of the choices I have had the freedom to make, but also because of the choices that have been made for me; at school by my teachers, at home by my family, and because of the consequences of other people's choices such as my

father's decision to leave when I was three years old.

> *This business with Korea has me a little worried but I feel that they are asking for it. Why won't people live in peace and leave well enough alone? Anyway if they don't give the ship and the men back we will have to go to WAR with them. The way I look at it they aren't leaving us much choice in the matter. I just don't understand sometimes.*

I am aware of the need to march to the tune of my own drum but I'm not sure I yet know how to do that as I wait for scholarship results to determine my future and I consider the repercussions for my family in making choices for myself; after two years of unassisted graduate studies, the family could use a break financially, so I should look into employment possibilities but attaining a teaching position in our area is remote. I have taken myself to the top of the pay scale in hard times; in order to continue my graduate studies, either my family would have to relocate or I would have to spend week days and nights away from them.

> *Well I don't know what is happening back home but I very seldom hear from anyone back there. I suppose when they get my letter telling them I'm extending, I can forget about mail completely. I'm still writing as much as I used to but pretty soon I'm going to cut down if I don't get any answers.*

How do I negotiate my role as caregiver and how do I care for myself? Which voice do I tune into when meeting again the multi-sided face of choice? I believe in creating my own destiny, but I am faced with a dilemma and that dilemma carries over to who I am when I wear my professional label of "teacher." How do I help my children and the children in my care make choices in their learning and what do they need to understand about the nature of choice?

> *I can't seem to put my thoughts into words right now but surely you must know a heart can feel so many*

things that words can never show.

My Story of Resistance and How it Brought Me To Teaching

Then, as now, a scholarship played a big part in the direction I would take. Even though the choice of being a Little Sister of the Poor was taken away from me until I was 21, the age when suddenly choice became a possibility promised by my mother's words that then I would be able to do whatever I wanted to, I still wanted to be a social worker. However, I was awarded a Teacher's Scholarship and not a Commonwealth Scholarship. As I think about it and the choices that were made for me, I wonder how my story of being a Little Sister of the Poor, had there been one, would have read. Would it too have become a story of resistance, or would I have felt more satisfied knowing that I was living my own choice? I will never know.

My story of becoming a teacher began the day I came into this world and will end the day I leave. It is not a single story of one event or time frame. It is on a continuum of experience that teaches me about life and leaves me to ponder a while those aspects of life that stand out for me as important or significant. Every waking moment I learn what it is to teach and I teach what it is to learn in conversation with many people or with myself. The words "teach" and "learn" don't often enter the conversation but that is what we are engaged in as we share our stories and sensemaking with each other and ourselves. It is appropriate that the most important insights about learning and teaching have happened in my own life as a child in the role of a learner, and as an adult, in the role of a friend, a teacher, a playground supervisor and, later, a mother.

For the purpose of this thesis I am drawing on one learning experience in

my life only, a learning experience which coincided with a lack of commitment to what was expected of me.

> *My experience in Vietnam has truly had a greater effect on my attitudes than I ever expected. I see my parents as I do most other things around here in such a different light now.*

Yet it is already obvious that this story is, as are all my stories, nested in a larger one. My "year off" teaching for $25 a week, which was a choice I made, brought me into contact with children. This was the year I "became" a teacher after one year of mostly non attendance at university and another at Teacher's College. It was also the last year of the resistance story of this time frame. Taking the "year off", I could have done something else. It was my choice. I could have worked in an office, or waitressed, or worked in a store. Any of these jobs would have paid more and would have had less responsibility. But teaching was offered to me and I welcomed the opportunity. I wanted to teach. I chose to teach. For the first time I saw myself as a teacher and it had nothing to do with power but everything to do with love, caring, commitment and learning; about life, about children and their interests, and about myself.

It was fortunate for me that at that time there was a teacher shortage because otherwise I might not have "become" a teacher. I might never have known the joy of being with children, would certainly never have heard Angela's story, might not have learned that children enjoy learning especially when they can manipulate the learning environment as they did with Cattegno rods, might never have learned that sometimes we teachers and parents do not act in the best interests of children despite our "good intentions" I remember Maria crying as she forced down her thickly sliced sandwich because her mother expected her to

eat everything in her overflowing lunch bag. I wondered how adults could know that something which made a child uncomfortable could be good for her. At the end of this year, my "year off", the Pope visited Australia.

> *How was the Pope's visit? I imagine the place was really crowded. I hope it was an interesting and fulfilling experience for you. You'll have to write and tell me all about it. OK?*

I began to look at the energy devoted to preparing for this visit and as I stood in the middle of a huge fairground with thousands of school children and their teachers in the hot Australian, December sun trying to catch a glimpse of him somewhere on a far off podium, I wondered how long I could show my respect before fainting. I began to question the value of some of my Catholic beliefs and by the end of this year I was beginning to sort out what to do with my life. Without this year I might not have gone back to Teacher's College.

> *How is school going? What did you get on your essay? ... I got a letter from my folks the other day. They wrote saying that they got an apartment for me at school, and frankly, I can't wait. It has a living room, bedroom, dinette, kitchen and bath. The living room and bedroom are carpeted, the kitchen has an electric range and refrigerator, and the whole thing sounds <u>great</u>! I shouldn't have over thirty days left in the Nam, so it won't be long. As soon as I get the address I'll send it to you.*

I went back because although I was already a teacher, I could only continue as a professional with the appropriate recognition and piece of paper. Then my orphanage, which became a shelter for dogs, which became an order of nuns, became a school for children to grow in, and eventually found its realization in my own classroom.

Learning "How" to Teach

> You cannot teach a person anything. You can only help them find it within themselves (Author Unknown).

I have difficulty remembering what I learned in my teacher training courses apart from how to write detailed lesson and unit plans. Formulas, however, do not work for me. I have difficulty following recipes. Although I know they work to produce an expected result, I can't help but add my own individual touch. I wonder why that is. Perhaps I have a basic mistrust or rebellion that has developed inside me to being told how to do things, even though I know they work for some other people and they are pleased with the results.

> *We are getting ready for Tet. Tet is the Vietnamese New Year. Our First Sergeant is so efficient he has us working after hours sandbagging the roof and rebuilding the bunkers till about 12 o'clock or the mortars start coming in which ever comes first*

Perhaps I see cooking as a creation that becomes merely an assembly line if I can't experiment a little to see what will happen if I do something different. As I write this I begin to see myself as more comfortable with taking risks than not. Perhaps I enjoy the element of not knowing exactly how something will turn out and the surprise (Noddings, 1984) that sometimes accompanies an experiment in cooking. Perhaps baking just invites me to receive it as something to respond to in an I-Thou relation (Buber,1970) that a recipe followed exactly does not permit.

Similarly as a teacher, I am constantly learning about my children's interests and search through references and texts looking for new and fresh ideas to support those interests. I cannot know everything but I can nurture ideas and

interests and help to open doorways. This does not fit with what I am expected to do in schools where I am "urged to teach more and more directly - to state exactly what students will do as a result of instruction and to prove they can do whatever has been stated" (Noddings, 1984, p.145-146). This is like following a recipe. Anyone can do that. It takes risk and trust to allow the baking, the subject to engage with me. My knowledge about who I am as a teacher came from other people who helped me first to figure out who I was/am as a person. Knowing who I am as a person helps me to articulate what I believe. That is the process in which I am engaged in this thesis as I awaken from one surprise to another, acknowledging myself as a writer in one flash and yet in another acknowledging that I am also a risk-taker. I am enjoying the surprises of self knowledge that shake me in this process.

I eventually acquired my university degree in Canada. The diploma I had attained in Australia was not recognized in Alberta and I was required to take ten courses in order to teach here. I was excited about the opportunity to re-enter a "place of learning." I felt ready for the commitment it would take. I knew that if ever I decided to make the commitment to learning in the future that I would do well. That time had arrived.

I majored in secondary music. Music had become second nature to me. I had started choirs and music clubs in Australia without any specific courses in these areas. They grew out of my own love for music. Secondary music meant that I would eventually be a band teacher. This was not quite what I expected but I took "how-to-play" courses and learned to play all brass, woodwind and percussion instruments. I also "learned-to-play" the violin, viola, cello and bass. The Superintendent of an out-of-town School District required a band teacher

and phoned the university asking for recommendations. I was recommended, interviewed and began teaching junior high band.

I was not a good band teacher. I really lacked the skills to effectively help the students with their technique and I lacked the personal background of having played in a band myself. My background was in piano and voice. I seem to have always had a problem with fit. In my life I never seem to be where I should be wherever that is.

> *I'm pulling night guard now on a bunker, so if you see any muddy rat tracks on my paper you'll know what happened. If you see a bloodsplash then you'll know it was either me or him and if I don't write anymore then you'll know it was him ... It sure is lonely out here. If my buddy whom I am pulling guard with was any better looking, I'd be tempted to ask him for a date. I think I will anyway.*

When teaching band the question was: What is your instrument? Embarrassed I would answer "piano and voice". When I returned to elementary and taught music, I was again asked at a festival, what my background was. I felt confident that my answer would be right this time, "piano and voice". But again I had the wrong answer, the expected response being "Orff or Kodaly."

I enjoyed being in a junior high school but I did not enjoy living in the noisy environment that four beginning grade seven classes, each with three lessons a week, and three grade eight classes, each with three classes a week, and I created. Perhaps it was because I had the wrong answers in my background.

> *This morning I took two of five tests. They are equivalent to one year of College. I took the ones on English Composition and Social Sciences. I knew they would be the more difficult ones for me, so I got them out of the way first. You know what? I didn't do very good. It's easy to become awfully stupid in three years. I noticed especially in Social Sciences there were a lot of questions I knew the answer to at*

one time, but just couldn't remember them. I'm sure I'll do better in the Math, Science and Humanities tests though.

It was a simple fact that my body just was not equipped to cope with constant noise. Sometimes the noise felt like torture. I missed the quieter sound of conversation. Seeing so many classes a day I felt more like a technician than a teacher. There was no time to get to know who the people in my band classes were. I began wearing ear plugs to cut down on the noise level. Ironically, somewhere in my second year I suffered permanent hearing loss in my right ear. Jessica would be born the following October. I resigned.

A friend had more piano students than she felt she could effectively teach and asked if I would help her out. I taught piano for four years until we moved. The economy played a big part in my choices at that time. It was always my desire to be at home with my children. My mother had missed that opportunity and I felt we all paid a price. However, Mel was out of work and I knew I had to do something. I was re-employed by the same School District in a part-time elementary position and I felt that I had found my niche. I can remember marvelling at the fact that I was being paid to do something that I found so rewarding. I taught language arts, music and the gifted program.

An opportunity came to move further north where it was felt that job opportunities would improve for Mel. I taught half time music and half time gifted. It was an ideal teaching position but I began to feel the isolation of the north and longed for red soil and the sounds of kookaburras.

Well it won't be long now and I'll be out of this man's Army. I get out on the 29th of May and should be in New Jersey by 4 o'clock in the Afternoon and home by six.

During the two years I have just briefly described I developed my music teaching abilities. I attended many excellent Saturday workshops where I sang, danced and played music in a congenial atmosphere of fun and productivity.

These workshops provided not only wonderful teaching experiences to take back to the classroom but also energized my personal and teaching spirit. As a music teacher I have continued to build on these experiences, constantly searching for music to adapt for improvisations of established techniques. I think the reason why the workshops were so beneficial was that I learned and performed what I was going to teach and then used the same material with my students the next week. There was no theory. It was all action in practice. I practised. We practised.

I learned that some approaches work with some groups and not with others and that what works for other teachers may not work for me. I learned that the teaching/learning exchange revolves around not content, but primarily, before content, the teachers and learners who occupy together that special space. Learning to teach is ongoing. I must be who I am. I have to smile if I feel a smile. I have to frown if I feel a frown. I have to be myself. I have to know who myself is and I have to be aware of who the children are so that we can create a space where they can also be themselves. I need to know how they feel about noise and quiet, about conversation, in groups and with another. I need to know how they feel about themselves, what's *deep down inside* beneath their shells. I need to know because I think of the energy I wasted living in fear during my own elementary school years.

Who You Know Is More Important Than What You Know

My elementary teachers did not know me, did not know who I was *deep down inside beneath my shell.* They were concerned with my outside appearance which in no way reflected the sadness inside. Religion was taught as a subject but it often served to fuel my fears: I thought it was just astounding that Our Lady chose special children to appear to as she did at Lourdes. What was so good about them? Why were they so holy? How could they stand out over all the other children in the world? I wondered what special qualities they had and I hoped, although I wanted to be holy, that I didn't have them. My worst fear was the possibility of having an ethereal figure from another world appear to me and talk to me, telling me what I must do, even if that figure was the holiest of them all, the Blessed Virgin, Mother of God.

> *I had two hours in Saigon the other day and I stopped by the Little Chapel they have at the heliport and I said a prayer for you and your folks. I am sure a family as nice as yours is well watched over by God. But I just thought I would put my two cents worth in.*

I had a luminous statue of Our Lady that glowed in the dark. One night I decided to sleep in the loungeroom, as though it were my own room. As my eyes cast around the dark room they suddenly settled on the luminous figure of Our Lady on the mantelpiece. I loved her but I did not want her to appear to me. My heart raced and I began to sweat. Not now, I wasn't ready for an apparition. I just wanted to see what it felt like to have my own room. But the presence was too apparent, too close. If I stayed there, she'd appear to me and ask me to do something to save the world. But I couldn't do it because I had no power and she would be disappointed.

Things have been pretty tense over here. A lot of terrorism and infiltration. We found a booby trap right inside our door the other day with a hand grenade in a bag set to go off when anybody looked in it. Fortunately we found it and called the appropriate people to come and remove it.

I screamed for help and returned trembling to the security of my room, the same, safe, overcrowded room I shared with my mother and my sister, the room where I had such a tiny, little space, my bed, that was mine.

As I retell this story, I become aware of the totality of the weaving of my life. The past, present and the future entwine. How can I separate any part of my life from my life story which is also my teaching story? As I retell the images that emerge, I wonder where they come from; snatches of memories stored for what purpose and how do they know to surface now? It reminds me of being engaged in a life setting and suddenly becoming conscious of a song that has been playing in my head without my awareness but that is totally appropriate to the situation.

Just thought I'd blow your mind today. I am going to send you some choice words from some special songs. I hope you get something out of them as they all have a hidden meaning ... well that's about all I have to say so I'll let the words of the songs say the rest. I just wish you could understand what these groups in the states are saying.

I was a quiet, well behaved little girl. I did my work carefully and always listened. My hair was neatly pulled back into two long braids that hung down my back. I was the picture of calm and innocence, a little plump, a good child, a child that made no demands, a child you might not notice. The following comment from a grade three report card was typical.

Jan is a very good little student. She gives perfect satisfaction in every subject

Like a pair of inside shoes that were clean, I presented myself on the outside. But my true self, who I was on the inside, remained left at the door, out of sight. It was too much trouble to look at my outside shoes, my inside self. It took too much effort, was too complicated and not worth the effort. But I wonder what childhood would have been like with the fear and inhibitions removed. How would my learning have been different?

> *I was thinking about this question; is not the personality of a person and the way he feels about his life greatly influenced by the way he was raised?... he might try to correct the life he lived as a child ... by raising his children in a nice family life ... where each child is given equal opportunities.*

Probably because of the loneliness of my own childhood, I am aware of the depth of children's feelings and I try to attend to them. I am ever mindful of quiet children and wonder if their silence resembles the silence of my childhood.

As I write my multidimensional story of becoming a teacher, I am surprised at how I am led back to my childhood again and again, for this was not my intention. However, the more I write, the more apparent it becomes that who I am is very deeply rooted in my responses to childhood experiences. As a researcher, I become conscious of the academic gaze and I wonder about the questions that might be asked: What has this got to do with the advancement of knowledge? Can researcher and researched be one and the same person and maintain validity? Where does this fit into elementary education?

> *Don't let my thoughts complicate your life. I only hope they will help.*

In response to my own perceived questions, I think about what the response would be if I were telling teaching stories about children in my classes.

I imagine they would appear insightful and enlightening. However, because it is very difficult to know exactly what is going on in the inside, unless for example, it is written down in a letter and can be reflected upon, interpretation becomes a very questionable procedure, especially in the case of a child's life.

> *If you never write back or we never see each other again, I'd like to thank you for showing me how to be real and not something plastic and pseudo.*

Offering my life, on the other hand, enables me to call on the depth of my own feelings through memory, not because it still hurts, but because it is still there and always will be. My experiences have shaped the person who writes this thesis, who is the same person who is a teacher, mother and friend. I can share what it was really like to be a child making sense. I know what was and is inside my shell, *the real me.* I do not interpret someone else's feelings. Instead, I write my feelings and as I summon up my own child, I am reminded of how very deeply all children feel. I particularly become conscious of the quiet ones, the ones who might go unnoticed. It is important for me to know who my children are before I give any thought as to what they should learn. In getting to know my children I commit myself to them and receive them as "human being(s) responsible for (their) own acts" (Noddings, 1984, p.178) and they are "through that commitment - set free to pursue (their) legitimate projects" (p.177).

> *I was discharged in California and I visited some aunts and uncles before coming back home. When I finally got home, I went down to see my fiancee, Marilyn. She wasn't home but out fishing. I went out to the lake to see her. She was on the opposite side of the lake, and when she saw me, I never saw a girl run so fast! We were pretty happy to see each other. It had been 16 months and 5 days since we last saw each other. It's great being home.*

Feeling of Connection

I like talking and I like listening. My Grandmother was a great story teller. When I came home from school, she'd be sitting at the kitchen table preparing the vegetables for tea (the Australian term for the evening meal). I'd sit down, have some afternoon tea which she had prepared and we'd talk.

> *Concerning the letter your mother read. No objection at all. I do hope I made a good impression and that I never write anything I wouldn't want her or anyone to read.*

Sometimes she'd tell stories about how her Grandma used to hide the famous bushranger, Ned Kelly, when he was on the run, or about her brother and sisters' adventures on their daily six-mile horse and buggy ride to school, or about when she was a governess on a property for three children, about how she took up smoking and her younger sister told her it broke their mother's heart, or my favorite one about Old Singh who was cremated on a barge on the Murrumbidgee River, and while still burning, sat bolt upright. Over the years she told these stories over and over again. These times were peaceful, reflective times.

> *I feel I could tell you my life story and not bat a bloody eyelash.*

Other times I caught Grandma at the kitchen table when she was engaged in a game of solitaire or patience as it was called, or when she enticed me into a game of poker. These quiet times were ripe for bringing out a few good stories accompanied by a "nice cup of tea and sometimes a biscuit."

> *You and your family were so good to me. Tell your grandma that the cookies made it back and were extremely good.*

Grandma always had time, she was always there and she enjoyed a good yarn, despite the fact that she didn't realize the extent of my feelings for losing my father. I learned to value good talk as I was growing up although I didn't always feel free to voice my own opinion. Yet as I write this I begin to feel another awakening because actually there were spaces for me at that kitchen table, in that kitchen, at certain times. My mother was always working and then too tired, but Grandma was always there and maybe was not perfect in my eyes but she did value me. Her nickname for me, the oldest of her nine grandchildren was "Dearest."

> *You really made me feel good about myself, relaxed like I was right at home. I guess you are just that kind of a person and I am happy that you spent some time with me while I was there.*

I'm beginning to understand that it must have been hard for her to have her daughter and two children in the house at a time when she should have been enjoying peace and quiet, although she always said that my sister and I kept her young. She was a talented resourceful woman and fiercely proud. We had nothing materially but I wasn't aware of it. Somewhere along the line I learned to feel good about myself and I internalized my worthiness as a good person. I had many inadequacies regarding my physical appearance and was a "plump" child which caused me grief, but I always felt quietly honest inside. I spent a lot of time talking with my friends. I enjoyed the conversations.

> *It was just great to sit down and talk and spend a peaceful afternoon with friends.*

They didn't talk about the war, they never used the sort of language that is spoken in movies about the war. We shared stories about ourselves in a mutual

exchange of words. I still have difficulty understanding why this was so natural. There was an absence of game playing. Perhaps because time was of the essence: either we spent the time talking or we lost the opportunity forever.

> *I feel we could have talked about anything and reached a solution Looking back it's just amazing how well we got along. I felt as if we have known each other for a very lengthy period. Even though we have only known each other for a short time I feel I know the real you and how your brain operates.*

My own children are full of stories and I know it is important for me to listen to them and to respond in a way that let's them know I heard them. They have often complained that the teacher "never asks me" or that "I had my hand up for ages but she didn't pick me". I can remember this dilemma as a teacher: Whose turn is it to respond? Who shared their stories last time? Is everyone getting a chance to share? Time was again the factor because of the necessity of covering what was planned. The children who didn't get to share their stories were always disappointed.

My stories are heavily laced with my feelings and it is my sense that if my stories and feelings are valued by myself and my supporters, or as Noddings (1984) has termed such people, ones-caring, then I can better understand what is important to me. I can stand up and say no to war and other injustices such as the emphasis on competition rather than cooperation in our culture. I wish the same for our children.

> *Did you hear about Senator Robert Kennedy. The US isn't safe anymore for a person who speaks his mind ... I refuse to raise a family in the United States.*
>
> *I was rash in what I said in my last letter yesterday. I may be dissatisfied with what is going on back home but this now makes me all the more regenerate. America is my home and even though it*

may be quite unjust or out in the open to all criticism. I've got to stick by it and maybe later in life it will change as I hope others in our world will.

Chance Meetings and the Strength to be Myself

Since September, 1991, when I started my master's degree, I have been periodically supply teaching. This has brought me to consider the impact of brief meetings such as those with my friends; meetings that bring us into the lives of others and others into our lives accompanied by the very real possibility that we will never see each other again. These encounters, I think are often not valued as significantly relevant or important. But I am beginning to think seriously about the possibility that everyone whose space I become a part of gives me something of themselves which becomes part of who I am as I construct my life and negotiate the possibilities for what I might become.

My room mate has turned our little room into a hippie haven. He's got so many freaky pictures hanging around that I'm tempted to go berserk. My room mate is somewhat of a pothead, he's so unsure of himself that it's kind of pitiful. He buys things then finds out later that he doesn't really need it. He's just the opposite of me. I'm the kind of person who'll sit back and watch other people make idiots of themselves by not knowing how to do something. Well, anyway usually my buddy is out there looking like a yo-yo. He never learns from the mistakes he makes.

Just as I believe we construct our meaning and learn from one another, I believe that who we are is a construction largely by those who have occupied the same space with us for however brief or long a time.

I don't know how our little brief friendship has struck you but I feel kind of sad and hurt all the time.

This thought was given new force for me when a nineteen year old girl, Heidi, came to my house to get some hints, advice and reliable addresses to assist her in her forthcoming trip to Australia. I had resigned from teaching three months before Jessica was born because I thought it important to be at home with her. However, the economy dictated that I seek employment when she was eighteen months old. I supply taught while Erica was on the way. I liked supply teaching then just as now and I remember enjoying being with the children. Heidi told me she remembered when I substituted for her teacher when she was in grade two. She told me that I was different, that she had remembered me talking about Australia and that Australia became a place she hoped to visit.

> *You had said that you were thinking of going to Canada at some time. I just wanted to tell you of one place you must be sure to visit, Montreal, Quebec. I don't think there are many places in Canada quite as exciting or alluring as Montreal.*

She let me know that one day I made a difference in a little grade two girl's life. Had she not told me, I would never have known.

> *I wanted to try again to tell you how much it meant to me to have met you and to have spent what little time we did have together. I truly felt empty when I had to leave ... I don't think you really realize the closeness I felt for you in just that short time.*

I estimate that I have been in a classroom as teacher with approximately three thousand children. My position as music teacher in three large schools where every child in the school came to me for music has elevated this number as well as my experiences supply teaching. I remember faces and names, but not all. How has life turned out for them? Did I make a difference in their lives? How have they made a difference in mine? I think of the subtle ways people make a

positive difference in my life: a smile, a greeting, a sincere compliment, a response that assures me I was heard, a kind gesture, connected conversation.

> *Maybe I shouldn't say this but I wish I would have kissed you while I was there so that I could remember you by that too, but just knowing you is enough.*

Taking into account our moving and formation of new friendships, I am a person who has met a lot of people. I wonder what a reunion of all the people I have met in my life would look like. I wonder what a reunion of all the people with whom I have connected would look like. I wonder what a reunion of all the people I have met but not connected with would look like? And, finally, in this absurd little moment, I wonder what a reunion of all the people with whom I thought I connected and didn't, or with whom I thought I didn't connect but actually did, would look like.

As I reflect on the connection that was made and which led to a letter writing response/exchange that in turn has now become such a rich source for my own sense making, I think about who I am to people who have stepped briefly into my life and out again. The impression I leave on another person's life depends on who I am to them, how I relate to them and how I receive them.

> *With only a few days left in my battery, things seem to be going smoother. Soon this period of my life will come to an abrupt and long awaited end. There is one memory however, that I shall carry with me forever. That memory is of you and Australia.*

A professor at university once told our year of preservice music educators that we must not smile at our class for the first month or so until they had learned who was the boss and we had earned their respect. If we did smile, we

were told, the consequences would be devastating. For the rest of the year we could not possibly hope to achieve anything.

> *The next letter you write me will have to be to my house. I'll let you know how it is to be a person again when I get home.*

I processed what I was told but it did not feel right. It did not feel good to act out a role and not be me, to be a stern practitioner when I didn't feel this was appropriate. It was hard for me to live the school life without a sense of joy in my heart, largely my own experience as a student. It meant being a *lifer* and I had no intentions of being a *lifer*. I didn't know how to be a father and I had no desire to appear first "in the guise of" a god " and "later to be revealed as human" with the later surfacing of all my frailties. Instead I wanted to be connected with my students and to "think out loud" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 216) with them.

When I taught junior high band, I organized before-school practices which began at 8:00 AM for those who needed extra help learning to play their instruments. The rule at the school was that no students were to enter the building before 8:35 AM. One near retirement age teacher cautioned me about how "they" like to take advantage of young teachers and would use practice just as an excuse to get inside the building. I recognized her as a *lifer*! I thought how we all, teachers and learners, sacrifice our own and other's dignity when we miss the connection we have to one another. I hoped that my teaching would never become a "them" and "me" issue.

> *We have been hit the last three nights in a row by rockets and mortars and last night received automatic rifle and machine gun fire from the rice paddy ... the VC are getting courageous. They are in*

> *control of the city of Hue about 75 miles north of here and we hear they have overun Phu Bai and Khe Sanh. I am a little worried - they've never been so confident before. There even have been snipers downtown in Danang and yesterday afternoon they had 38 VC bodies stacked up on a helo pad out near the bridge! No one is safe! Well I don't feel like saying much more about all this, it isn't too happy ... The news is on now - Hue is in VC control, they have overrun PhuBai, and they are attacking all the outposts at the DMZ. We just received word that 300 Republic of Vietnam army uniforms have been stolen. That really helps!*

I wondered if the students also viewed teachers as "they" just as some of my colleagues viewed "them" as "they". If they did, then what was sacrificed in the tension created by such thinking and how would it be different if, instead, we all saw ourselves as "we" working together with a spirit of cooperation rather than tension? What would it take to develop such a spirit of cooperation?

It is spring, time to plant the garden and get rid of the weeds. I am always led in two directions at once when it comes to thoughts about beautifying the yard around our house. On the one hand I am drawn to create something aesthetically pleasing and acceptable like everyone else does on our block. On the other hand I wonder about the not beautiful weeds on my lawn and in my garden and the ferocity with which we dig them out and spray them to their death. Are they really that bad, the "them" and "they" weeds? Why do I want to pull them out? Because they are ugly? Because they will inhibit the growth of the beautiful ones? Because the other homeowners and the city expects it? Do I want to get rid of them for aesthetic reasons only? Is this a good enough reason to pull out weeds that cause no harm? Do harmless weeds become the enemy in the war to set the garden straight, a place where acceptable flowers only can grow? Would it be possible for the favoured and the not favoured to live together side by side in the same garden patch around my house? Would my neighbors accept this or would

they think me negligent for not eradicating the menace? Can the garden become a place to wage one's own war and to gain control of one's own spot on the planet? I am not very good at this thing of control. This year I will see how the weeds and flowers grow side by side and observe the reaction of the established aesthetic eye of my neighbors.

As a supply teacher, "control" has traditionally been an issue. It is almost expected that children will try to take advantage of a substitute teacher and have a more relaxed time while their regular teacher is away. I enjoy supply teaching because I have learned to be myself in a classroom of children I don't know. It helps that we live in a small city, that I am a mother with children in the school system, and, that I know the teachers well and feel comfortable in their staffrooms. My Vietnam experience, my story of resistance, has taught me to attend to chance meetings and to take them seriously. I take advantage of the opportunity I have, unrestricted by the pressure to "get through" a curriculum, to talk with the children. When we get into a conversation, everybody who wants to speak is given that opportunity. I have heard so many disappointed moans over the years because of time restrictions and the need to move on before we had exhausted an area of interest and as already stated I have listened to my own children's moans about not getting a chance to talk about what they were thinking because they "weren't picked." Now I believe in exhausting the possibilities for development by providing air time for everyone who wishes to speak and by trying "to connect, to enter into each student's perspective" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 227). It is my concern that not taking the time to exhaust the possibilities and accept different perspectives could indirectly silence children.

I have heard children's stories of "mean" substitute teachers. The meanness it seemed occurred when the substitute teacher misinterpreted the children's actions both because s/he sought command at all costs and/or didn't understand or try to understand, or there wasn't time to understand who the children were into whose space she had entered.

> *I flew with three Vietnamese student pilots today so naturally I'm a little tired and stressed. I can sympathize with you teachers believe me.*

Erica, came home one day and told me she was sent out of the room by a substitute teacher. I asked what happened and she said the teacher asked a question to which she answered to herself. The teacher told her to go out saying that there was going to be no talking out of turn. Passersby, including teachers and other students were apparently moved to inquire what she was doing out of the room and concluded it must have been a misunderstanding. I found it funny that anyone would actually put a child like Erica who is consistently gentle, kind and thoughtful, out of the room. She was not devastated, but she was surprised. As an insider in my child's life, I knew that Erica's intentions were misinterpreted. Control at all costs! Erica had experienced a *lifer*. The only way I could avoid being a *lifer* to another mother's child would be to dare to trust the previously unknown children in my life on that day of our meeting and to let joy, (Noddings, 1984) rather than fear be my guide. Tillich (1952) has shown me that being joyful rather than fearful and defensive affirms me as a person.

> The affirmation of one's essential being in spite of desires and anxieties creates joy ... Joy accompanies the self affirmation of our essential being, in spite of the inhibitions coming from the accidental elements in us. Joy is the emotional expression of the courageous yes to one's own true being. (pp.14-15)

Sharing Our Stories and Learning About the Human Condition

> I felt sad and unhappy for the soldiers. They must have had families and missed them very much. I know that I miss my family even when I go to my cousin's for a week. I felt sorry for them as you read their letters because I sort of felt their feelings in their words as you read. (Personal Communication, Grade 7 student, January, 1993)

In one of my first graduate courses I pursued the notion of what caring meant to me as a mother, friend and teacher. My journey led me to the realization that I need to cultivate an ability to listen with hearing if I am to be truly able to say "I care" so that my attention to those who share my life is a lived experience rather than a spoken one. I do not have to say "I care for you" because my attentiveness demonstrates my appreciation of the one to whom I attend.

> *In the last week I have written 14 letters. I think I wrote you about 3 or so, the rest were to Morton and my mother and a few to my friends and I have not got any letters back from anyone in the last week. I don't know if you or the others are getting my letters or not. If you are would you please let me know as I would like to find out how you are also what you have been doing.*

This attentiveness is central to my story of being a teacher. Noddings (1984) wrote that "training for receptivity involves sharing and reflecting aloud" (p.121).

> *My letters to you will probably be long ones because I have all night to write. I hope I can be interesting and perhaps you can learn a little about me. If there is anything you want me to tell you about myself or Vietnam or just anything, you need but ask. I'm very obliging when it comes to people I like ... Sometimes I even get creative and write poetry.*

In writing letters and receiving letters, in responding and being responded to, in caring and being cared for, I trained for teaching. In my story of resistance, I authored my own teacher education. This is where I also learned to value the personal lives of people, my own and theirs, our sensemaking, what goes on *deep down inside beneath my shell* because dialogue is central "in nurturing the ethical ideal ... it involves the kind of close contact that makes personal history valuable" (Noddings, 1984, p.122).

I am well aware that this study could be viewed cynically. I am not naive. I have read several documentaries, biographies and autobiographies detailing experiences in Vietnam. I know that many atrocities were committed and that 9,000 Amerasian children were left behind where they continue to be outcasts, abandoned by their fathers and a reminder to the Vietnamese people of gross interference by the American military machine. Should I even write my story, the story that appears in these pages? What about the cynics who might scoff at my words with an all knowingness that indicates they **know** what happened over there?

From the beginning I have been aware of the risk involved in writing this story because of the conditioning in our culture to label and stereotype people as well as the habit we have developed of bringing our own narrow biases and understandings to bear on the lived experience of others. I cannot know what another knows. I can merely hear her/his story and accept it as another story in the larger one, or, I can hear one story and presume it to be the only one choosing to ignore others.

This story embraces the narrative of my Vietnam experience. It is different to the dominant culturally accepted story of the Vietnam experience. It

is offered in a spirit of appreciation for the diversity of the experiences lived in any situation. If I am to truly understand the human condition I am to seek out the invisible, open my mind to other possibilities and not presume that my narrow viewing as an outsider, enables me to see all there is. Somehow I understood this at the time of my story of resistance. If I hadn't, this thesis, this story, this other voice in the conversation of life, would not exist.

P.S. ... thank you for holding my hand!

Chapter 7

Towards a Vision of Peace

> The letters show that they were normal people. They had been taught to fight. They were loyal to their country. War might not have been the right way to solve the problem though. (Personal Communication, Grade 7 student, January, 1993)

A Love Story

It may be obvious by now that this is a love story, a story of learning how to live, a story of a spirit finding cracks in her shell in order to filter through to the outside "World" where she could manifest her inside self, her truth.

I found this poem while I was reading in the library. It's quite lovely and each time I read it, I get something new from it. Though I didn't write it, the thoughts are mine and dedicated to you always ...

I love you,
Not only for what you are,
But for what I am
When I am with you.

I love you,
Not only for what
You have made of yourself,
But for what
You are making of me.

I love you
For the part of me
That you bring out,
I love you
For putting your hand
Into my heaped-up heart
And passing over
All the foolish, weak things
That you can't help
Dimly seeing there,
And for drawing out
Into the light
All the beautiful belongings
That no-one else had looked
Quite far enough to find.

I love you
Because you are helping me to make

Of the lumber of my life
Not a tavern
But a temple
out of the works
Of my everyday
Not a reproach
But a song.

I love you
Because you have done
More than any creed
Could have done
To make me good
And more than any fate
Could have done
To make me happy.
You have done it
Without a touch,
Without a word,
Without a sign,
You have done it
By being yourself.
(Ray Croft)

This is a story with the word "love" to qualify it and this story informs all of my relationships and their various intensities in kind: my love for Mel, my constant companion of the last seventeen years; my maternal, nurturing love for Jessica, Erica and Leif, my children; my love for my mother and sister, who have always been in my life; my love for my women and men friends with whom I continue to question and wonder why; and, my love for the children with whose care I am entrusted as a teacher.

> *Personally I have realized that love is not just emotional feeling. It is more than feeling. It is also patient, kind, understanding, tender, unselfish, does not demand too much, does not expect too much, is not too critical, is not too sharp in words, or unfair in judgement, or unkind in deeds, and it is never envious, not arrogant, or proud, or self-seeking, or touchy or resentful.*
>
> *This is a description of love. We really can't define love by words, for words are too crude for the highly refined characteristics of true love - but one can express love by words and deeds.*

I have already stated that Larry's death was not a war story. It is not a war story,

it is a love story, part of the larger love story I have shared here of how I learned and continue to learn to live in relation through receiving and sharing stories of what it is to be human and what it is to teach. I am changing O'Brien's (1991) words of what a war story is, as quoted on p.6 of this thesis, to illustrate what a love story is: A true love story is always moral. It seeks to instruct, encourages virtue, suggests models of proper behavior ... There is rectitude. There is virtue. As a rule of thumb, therefore, you can tell a true love story by its absolute and uncompromising allegiance to goodness and joy (adapted from O'Brien, 1991, p.76).

> *I have asked myself many times what makes a home a home ... I realize that a family living in a house doesn't necessarily make a house a home. Love makes a home, or a house is a home because each member of the family truly loves each other. Then I asked myself "What is love?" In Greek, there are definite, distinct words for the love of God, for brotherly love, for love of husband and wife, for love of one's children, for love of self, and for love of money, pleasure and high public position. I have chosen four main words that were used to translate the word "love" to exemplify the distinction and distinguish the varieties of love. They are as follows:*
> *1. AGAPE - meaning God's love for women and men, and men's love for God. This was the highest degree of love for the Greeks.*
> *2. PHILIOS - meaning love for friends, brothers and sisters.*
> *3. EROS - meaning love for husband or wife*
> *4. EPITHUNIA - meaning love of money, lust, pleasures or evil.*
>
> *My hope for my own love may be too idealistic to ever be practical or true, but that's what love means to me. I asked one friend, who is happily married what his love meant to him before he was married. He said "It was an itching sensation in my heart that I didn't know how to scratch".*

Expressing My Art

If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed

> to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that the gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength (Carson, 1956, p. 29).

Last fall I tried to articulate thoughts about other ways of knowing, about an elusive something that I felt was overlooked and hence missing in education. I could feel it but I couldn't touch it. I began to think it had something to do with the arts and spirituality, caring and being cared for, wonder and awe, surprise and believing. I thought it was somewhere in the spaces waiting, not easily seen and not easily measurable.

Matthew Fox's (1991) work has assisted me in coming closer to understanding what it was I felt. He calls for each of us to recognize the artist in ourselves and to express our creativity in a meditative sense as distinct from a commercial one. He acknowledges that we lost the ability to create when we began living by others' expectations of who we should be and what we should do. Building on Fox's statement I believe that creativity has nothing to do with a person's skills and everything to do with meditation, reflection and expressing deepest feelings and memories. It is an expression of thought which is an expression of one's spirituality. An artist is one whose senses are awakened, who learns through the pores and trusts her/his own imagination. The telling of my own story, in this sense, defines me as an artist. Evaluation of this work can be determined by the degree of satisfaction I feel at having succeeded at expressing what I wanted to as well as recognizing the surprises that emerged along the way. Evaluation by a reader can be determined by a recognition of this work as a rendering of one more story from the vat of our human condition through the

feeling of connection to what is deep down inside her/his own shell. What do I lose if I am not given the space to write my own story? What happens to my stories if I do not have the opportunity to author them? Where do my thoughts and feelings about a story go? Do they mutate and leave me disillusioned, confused and unvalued if I cannot meditate on them and get them outside myself through authoring? Authoring my life authorizes my life and connects me to others who are written into my story through conversation, both oral and written, and to those who begin thinking about the expression of their own artform through reading mine.

Getting in Touch with Spirituality

Fox (1991) has also provided me with a way to think about experience in terms of spiritual development. He names the four paths of the journey "so that people can share in a common language" (p.15). The four paths tell us what matter: awe in the mystery of nature and all beings matter; darkness, suffering and letting go matter; creativity, imagination and trusting our images enough to express them matter; justice and the search for balance and celebration for the "gift of being and being together" (1991, p.18), which defines compassion and our interconnectedness (Capra, 1982; Bateson, 1990), matter.

It is feasible to consider that my letters have, and are, taking me on a spiritual journey. Path one was the experience of meeting the authors, writing and receiving letters. In path two I let go of the experience as I left them and their stories in silence for all those years. I am presently engaged in path three as I reflect, restory and learn to trust my images. I travel path four in my sense making, and take along with me the readers of my words who may feel

verisimilitude and a sense of connectedness. In the spirit of interconnectedness with them, with me, with you, it is hoped that the words of my narrative "have shape and weight" so that "you can touch them" and "wear them like a second skin" (Marshall, 1987, p. 262). A spiritual journey begins to read like a narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 1986, 1988, 1991); a journey in narrative which may bring me closer to being able to articulate what, for me, is missing in the way we presently tell our stories and in our current story of education.

The day after I printed up the first draft of this thesis, I shared the letters once more with a group of children from grades three to six in a lunchtime Peer Support Group meeting. There were also five teachers present. The response of both the children and the teachers was overwhelming. They phoned me at home to tell me how powerful and moving they found the messages in my presentation. Two teachers continued on with what we had started in the noon hour, initiating the session with the importance of chance meetings. One of these teachers phoned me the next day informing me that the story of the letters, what now through the telling has become our shared story, moved two Cambodian children in her room to speak of their experiences of living in war and violence in camps before coming to Canada. She said they seldom speak but the story I had told through my letters and which the teachers had re-told were added to by two little Cambodian children who very rarely speak. She had to go, it was time for the children to come into the building. I could sense the emotion in her voice as she said goodbye. I put down the receiver and the flowing of my tears sounded like the howling of coyotes in the middle of a fifty below winter's night. I ask again: How is it that these letters are so powerful in speaking to children and those who

hear them? And I wonder, what would have been lost if my advisor had not also seen that I should look at these letters? What if we had not taken this risk in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta where some people continue to ask what this work has to do with elementary education? The stories of my letters provide an impetus for more stories and more understanding of the human condition, of ourselves and of the condition of war, stories that might not otherwise be told and understandings that might not have been formed until too late. So far we have, in Canada and Australia, escaped the reality of grandscale war on our own soil.

Yesterday, when I was at the school, another teacher who was present at the sharing session asked me what I thought spirituality meant. I had not used this word when sharing the letters, yet I know it is present in this work and in my letters. It's a good question and one which I must answer as part of this thesis. In accordance with the understandings I have formed in the writing of my story, the answer is a simple one. Spirituality is what is *deep down inside beneath my shell*. The "*what*" are my feelings and the expression of those feelings is the artistic creation by me the artist who wishes to seek out and to understand what it is that lies in that special breeding ground beneath *my shell*.

My letters reveal what was in the breeding ground of the composite experience of their authors' lives. They contributed to my breeding ground of experience. The spiritual connection of our humaneness is evident when I share the letters (the medium of the expression of the authors' spirituality), with the children and teachers who also feel the pain (Macy, 1983) through connecting to what is inside their own shells, their own spirituality. Noddings (1984) words of living an ethic of care have provided me with a language to describe how to

connect with others in order to create safe ground where we can mutually filter through our shells and become artists through the expression and sharing of our spirituality. This connection is what religion is supposed to be about but religion sometimes keeps us apart.

> *I didn't tell my mother about you because we had an argument on Catholicism and telling her about you would have only made things worse. Naturally I defended it right down to the end and though she'll never change her views, I think she's a little more liberal and peaceful now. If you remember my mother (step) is protestant as is everyone (all of my father's family) else, and my brother in the seminary is the only full-fledged Catholic. Myself I have to practice myself on the side. It seems everyone holds that against me and there's been quite a few problems over Catholicism. After my mother died, Dad took us out of the Catholic Church and my brother went to the seminary after high school. Naturally he's treated as a son, but he's also a black sheep, and I have a tinge of grey because they found out I'm still attending church. This is really a sore subject in the family and I'm doing my best*

The narrative journey of my thesis has in itself been a spiritual journey of getting in touch with what I feel, which when allowed-to-be, or recognized through storying, has become what I know. Writing my thesis reminds me of the journey of my life; I have made choices which have taken me in certain directions. I will never know what other directions might have yielded. But maybe that is not important. Perhaps the questions that arise are what's important and perhaps the questions yielded in another story would remain the same.

Education: My Purpose

One of the major awakenings in writing this thesis is to a personal

understanding of who I am as a teacher. I have often been asked during interviews for teaching positions, to state my philosophy of education. My standard reply has involved a few words around providing a safe place for the children in my care to grow and I still believe this, but it has become much more. It is no longer satisfactory for me to articulate my philosophy about being with children as teacher with such a broad statement. My task becomes finding a way to explain how I might create such a safe environment and why I think it is important. What have I learned about myself as a teacher?

It is not my job to fill empty vessels with information. Rather my value is in helping learners to open doors on their own knowledge so that they can construct their own meanings. Spirituality is a thread running through this thesis. It is what's *deep down inside beneath my shell*, the essence of my being. I stated on p.17 that "our thought is an expression of our spirituality." However I now think that this thought comes from an intuitive knowing that is deep down further than conscious thought. This intuitive knowing may inspire thought if it has been valued, and may be recognized at times as a feeling or feelings about something. This is different again I think to the emotional feeling I experience in response to something. It is a knowing in it's own right but a knowing that is often difficult to acknowledge. It is the knowing that is *deep down inside beneath my shell*. It is my spirit. I suspect my spirit was sent underground during my childhood years. The nurturing of a spirit requires the acknowledgement of diversity. I don't think we've been very good in our culture and in education at recognizing and promoting individuality. It is easier to control people with rules and to conform them to standards than to allow independent spirits to grow.

Although there have been others, for my purposes here, two experiences

stand out as nurturing of my spirit: my Vietnam experience and the experience of working with my advisor, Jean Clandinin. During my first term of graduate studies I experienced being a learner with two very different responses. In one situation I felt restrained, like a tiger without enough room to turn around in my cage. I had no freedom. I felt it was my task to figure out what the professor wanted me to write about and think about and then to do it her way. At times I felt nauseous and as though my brain was manacled, even mangled. Blank eyes told me I was not heard no matter how hard I tried to explain another point of view.

With Jean, however, I experienced a freedom I have rarely experienced in education before. It was as though she opened the gates on the compound, that part of my brain where I processed the learning of the academic institution. She also enlarged the perimeters, so that I could move around in there. Three sides were closed but one side had an opening, a rather large gate that always stayed open. This gate gave me access to a field where I could run and explore to eventually find safe footing on the top of a grassy knoll. Here my skirts and hair flowed in the warm, gentle breeze and as I turned to face the sun ready to lift off with the freedom of a bird, I noticed again and again, the many colors and types of wildflowers, sometimes bold, sometimes hidden on that knoll. Here I could express the essence of me, my spirituality and because the gate stayed open I was also free to return to the structure of the compound. I was free to go back and forth. I think this thesis is an example of the unity of these images and the balance that I seek in my own learning.

Jean has been a role model for how I want to tell my story of being a teacher. The trust she showed in handing over to me an opportunity to create

this thesis from my own life experience, tells me she values me as a person who is a learner. The risk involved in providing the freedom to explore an alternative understanding of teacher education tells me she believes in me as a person who is a learner. Narrative has been the medium of my art in this thesis. There are, however, other possibilities. I could have expressed my thoughts and feelings about becoming a teacher in song, or with paints, pencil or crayons. I might have represented such an education in sound, alternating children's voices with Beethoven, the Doors, the sounds of M16s popping amidst the contrasting jive of a canopied Asian jungle, whirling helicopter blades and incoming from the rice paddies.

As a teacher, I need to first understand who the person is who comes to me to learn. I need to help her and him to find out what is deep down inside and to get in touch with that unique spiritual self so that s/he can know what is there, value it and learn from it. If s/he values and cares for herself then s/he can better value and care for others. I can begin to imagine a cooperative world, a world where butterflies talk to flowers and we can all join in the conversation. What I must be careful not to lose sight of, however, is that shells are different. They can be hard, brittle, smooth or corrugated. They can be sea shells or bullet shells. I can help create the shells and it is possible for me to create shell shock if I am not ever mindful and thoughtful about how I respond to another.

Reflection on my Vietnam experience through the letters written to me from there, has also brought me to a realization that we often live lives differently on the outside to how we interpret our lives on the inside. It is my sense that harmonizing my inside and outside selves can enable me to more clearly articulate what I believe is best for me, those around me, other humans in

my world and other life forms on this planet. My purpose as a teacher is to ensure that I do nothing to turn children against themselves by denying them a relevant curriculum as may happen when I presume to know what they should learn. My purpose is also to help children find out what they know so that they can make informed choices in their lives by much discussion that raises many questions about the issues that arise. My purpose is to help children understand that there are many sides to a story and many possibilities for choice in the hope that in a group they can express what it is they feel without handing over major decisions, such as the one to kill in war, to institutions. This is a situation with which I still grapple. How do I, when I can see the other side of a story, articulate what I think I know or feel to be right at the time, in a group where those who emerge as the dominant voices and hence the leaders, see things clearly in black and white? How do I with my still tentative, letter writing voice be heard, and when, and if I'm heard and I find myself influencing others, how do I maintain my mother self and avoid becoming one of the fathers? "What we need is a generation of students who are fearless in the face of the tentative" (Samples, 1987, p.222). What we need, also, is a generation of teachers who are fearless in the face of the tentative in order to assist a generation of learners to create their own curriculum from their own lives in order to get to the important issues about being human in this world. What could be a greater purpose in education than to address the issues of life?

This then is what is *deep down inside my shell*, the breeding ground of not experience, after all, but my spirituality, where the composite of the narratives of my living continue to ebb and tide in varying degrees of ceaseless motion towards a better understanding of who I am: a woman who is a mother and a friend

learning what it means to teach.

Chapter 8

The Closing of a Book

> *I thought I would try just once more to see if I could get a response from you. It's been since August 18 that I heard from you & I'm sure I've written at least 10 letters since then.*

One of the dilemmas in rereading these letters is trying to remember and understand how the letter writing stopped. In many cases the sets of letters by individual authors are chronicles because there is no ending (White, 1981). It seemed to me that once the authors returned to the "World" they would have so much to contend with in their readjustment that there would be no time to write to me. And perhaps when they were back in the "World" there was no longer a reason for me to write. There was relief to know they were safe and sometimes the situation caused dilemmas of the heart but that was the way it was.

> *By the time you get this letter I'll be thinking very much of going home. I have two months to do until I go back. What I'm trying to say is that this will be my last letter. It's very hard to write this because I hate to say goodbye ... Your letters have been lovely and I'm glad to have them. But it is time for you to stop writing also ... I could tell you my reasons for the way I feel but they haven't made an airplane or boat big enough to carry my list to you ...*

And that is not an uncommon text in my dominant story. Having moved extensively during seventeen years of marriage within both Canada and Australia, I have had to say many goodbyes and I saw myself in Amy Tan's fictional character in The Joy Luck Club:

> And now at the airport, after shaking hands with everybody, waving goodbye, I think about all the different ways we leave people in this world. Cheerily waving goodbye to some at airports,

> knowing we'll never see each other again. Leaving others on the side of the road, hoping that we will. Finding my mother in my father's story and saying goodbye before I have a chance to know her better. (Tan, 1989, p. 330).

Returning to my letters creates a whole new understanding that I didn't have when I read them for the very first time, and allows for the sort of reflection that could not happen without them. I begin to wonder about what I've suspected for a while, that what is close to the heart is also what matters and is also what's missing. Farley Mowat (1992) wondered if he was *led* back to the collection of dialogic letters that his father had saved for him.

As I reread and relived my letters I also felt led back into the time of my adolescence and I mourned for a while its loss, except when I remembered the pain of breaking through the boundaries while negotiating responsive relationships (Gilligan, 1990). Is *my* vulnerability also written into the letters that I wrote and sent out to people who are friends of the past? Where are the letters I wrote? Do my letters, which became their letters, still exist? Was it as natural as breathing for anyone else to keep the letters I sent? Did at least one of them go back to the "World" in a box marked "personal belongings" or "personal effects" or whatever term the military uses to wrap up and code all that remains of a person for whom the imminence of death reached ground zero? Are any of my letters in trunks with a uniform, medals, pictures, a memory box of war memorabilia better forgotten? Who kept them? What would they offer to the person who might reread them? I wonder about the friends who helped to shape who I am ... and memories come flooding down the river of time ...

I remember the letters I owe to friends in Australia and think about the ways we write the legacy of our lives into the hearts of others (Palmer, 1986). I feel the urgency to find, no not to find ... to *make* the time to write, so that they

know I care, so that I can remain in touch with what's close to my heart, which has something to do with my spirituality and me as an artist in the present from the past for the future, and in so doing, attempt to remain forever sincerely, Jan

...

> *I guess I never told you about my nickname. The guys in my Company call me "CHIEF." I am not a chief, much less a leader, but one time someone was teasing me about my Indian heritage and called me CHIEF. Then everyone else started calling me by that name ...*
> *...I don't like to wait for the time when I like, or need to do what I believe or feel is important, because if I wait for that time, that time will never come ... because if I feel that I don't have the time, I will never have the time. So I have to make the time for what I feel is important and do it within that time. If I can't do it today, I might think that I could do it tomorrow, when I have the time, but if today has no time for me, tomorrow has no time either.*
> *Each day it seems like I don't have very much time for myself, but I like to make the time when I could write to you. Sometimes, I like to get away from my ugly buddies so I could be alone with myself, and be alone with my thoughts and write a few paragraphs on what I feel, what I think about, what I like to share with you, and what you might enjoy reading about, because you mean that much to me.*

PS. I will always remember ...

Coda

A Letter to Grandma

Dear Granny,

Well I have used my letters. What do you think? I'm sorry that I couldn't save yours and do something with them. I'm sorry that you didn't do something with them. Why did you save them? Did you ever intend to use them or were they a comfort, a reminder of connection? I think of mine as a sort of catalog of my life and I'm very glad that I inherited your disposition to hoard, even though others may view us as silly for keeping these bits of the stuff of our lives. My memory just could not contain the words of my letters and I could not have reflected this way without them.

Can you hear me? Are you there or did it all end when your heart stopped beating? If you're there have you met Larry? Did you both collaborate, whisper in my ear to inspire me to write this? Kris wrote that she thought I was spiritually inspired. Her statement surprised me coming from someone so practical. But when I think about it, maybe it is possible that you and Larry decided that this would be a good thing for me to do. I want to return his letter to his family and maybe send them a copy of my thesis. I think that would be alright. As the mother of a son who hopefully will never know what Larry knew, I would feel good about the fact that someone had kept my son's letter and returned it years later.

I wonder why I'm writing this letter. If you're there you probably know what I'm thinking anyway. It just feels like a good way to finish off my thesis and I have come to value what feels right. I hope I can get in touch further with my true, deep down feelings in the future to guide me in my decisions. It's not an easy thing to do but I think it's worth working at. Maybe our deep down feelings are connected to those who care for us and have passed on and continue to speak to us. If you are there you know the answer to this and many other questions that I wonder about. I hope you're there but if you're not I guess you left something for me to think about so that you are actually here in me and so is Larry and Great Granny and Grandpa.

I'd like to include an excerpt from a poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson that Kris sent me after reading my proposal. You may not need to hear it - if you're there you know it already - if you're not then maybe I just need to include it for myself; to use something my sister gave me in response to something I wrote and to help me understand why I'm here and to help me contemplate once more the eternal "what's it all about" question.

> To laugh - often and much;
> to win the respect of intelligent
> people and affection of children;
> to earn the appreciation of
> honest critics and endure the
> betrayal of false friends;
>
> To appreciate beauty, to find
> the best in others, to leave the
> world a bit better, whether by

a child, a garden patch, or a redeemed
social condition;

To know even one life has
breathed easier because you
have lived, this is to have
succeeded.

Can you pass this on to Larry too? Not many people will read my thesis but it will stay in the family to reflect on in the future and who knows, one of my grandchildren, your great, great grandchild, might share our interest in the stuff of our lives and return to the letters to find other clues to the what's-it-all-about question. Both you and Larry continue on in me and who I am as I relate with other people. His letter, which I probably saved through your example, informs me about life and time. I know now that forever really does go beyond the grave. I also know now that we live on in each other, dependent on the lessons we construct in our time and in the same way that genetically coded cells are reproduced and sloughed off in order to maintain the growth and development of a body. As a result of this interconnected construction of knowledge, I see us slowly and steadily moving, as a single human organism in process, towards something better. This understanding makes me breathe easier.

Your Dearest Forever,

Jan

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